NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07954919 6

Pentecost

25 cts.

GIFT OF IRVING LEVY 1920

WHAT I BELIEVE

BY

HUGH O. PENTECOST

Pond

GIFT OF IRVING LEVY

WHAT I BELIEVE

BY

HUGH O. PENTECOST

HUGH O. PENTECOST, PUBLISHER
56 ORIENTAL STREET,
NEWARK, N. J.

PHILLIPS LIBRARY
916891

CONTENTS.

I. Inspiration, - - - 1
II. Miracles, - - - - 51
III. God, - - - - 85
IV. Jesus, - - - - 123
V. The Church, - - - 163

NOTE.

The following pages were written during a period of serious mental unrest as an expedient for relief. They are published in the hope that they will do good. They were written very rapidly and, I might almost say, at one sitting, since I wrote eight or ten hours a day upon them until they were finished. This will partly account for their style, in so far as they have any. I was away from my library during their composition, and they will, accordingly, be found to contain very few quotations or references to books. Those who are familiar with "The Bible for Learners" will recognize my indebtedness to that invaluable work in two places. With this exception I am not aware of having borrowed anything not inclosed within quotation marks. All foot-notes have been avoided because I wish the book to be read without having the reader pestered with interruptions. There is nothing new nor

remarkable in these pages and the only excuse for their publication is that they discuss great themes in simple, straightforward language, something for which I am always very thankful when I am lucky enough to fall in with an author who has cared to make a similar attempt.

I published the book myself partly because I had not the courage to submit it to a publisher and partly because I supposed no publisher would handle it, even if it was acceptable, unless he or I had it copyrighted. This I prefer not to do or have done for reasons which are satisfactory to me. If any one wishes to republish the book or any part of it, I shall be glad to know of its wider circulation, and if he makes money by the venture he will, no doubt, send me what he considers my share, as I think I should do were the case reversed.

The book is given to its readers, as I know it will be received by them, for what it is worth.

H. O. P.

INSPIRATION.

Why seek other than the most general definition? An indefinable influence upon the mind — the personality — of man, supposed to proceed extranaturally from God. That is, in broad outline, what we understand by inspiration. It is supposed to move toward right conduct, more or less imperatively, more or less successfully. It is supposed to move toward right thought, and to express itself in writing. It is supposed to open a wider realm to thought than is possible to unassisted reason; windows into infinitude; lenses into super-nature. The conduct of inspired men becomes to those who range upon a lower plane of experience — holy. The writings

of such men become infallible; it is REVELATION. Not a natural getting at the fact, but an imparting of the fact — supposed fact — to the receptive man, as into a vessel. The fact, too, is of such a nature as to be not obtainable in any other way. It must be imparted or it could never be known, since it is beyond the range of human experience. The method of knowing the thing and the thing known, or said to be known, are equally superior to natural methods of acquiring information and natural subjects of information. The things revealed are, necessarily, undebatable and undeniable. There is no platform, not even the small surface of some post-top, upon which an opponent may get any kind of footing, not to say spread for his footing. How can one deny what is no more subject to proof than denial? If the supposed inspired man is actually inspired, then the thing uttered for truth is truth. But if

the supposed inspired man is not really inspired then he knows no more of the matter than another, not necessarily as much as some possible other. What he says may be true or it may not. It is not true upon his authority unless he is inspired, and unless, too, he can make it quite clear to others that inspiration is a part of human experience and that he, in particular, is or was, when the thing was said, inspired.

Inspiration is supposed by those who believe in Revelation to be sometimes verbal and mechanical and sometimes merely psychical or dynamic. In one case, if the man is a writer as well as a doer, and his writings are under consideration, he is an automaton, an instrument, not an intelligent agent; a mere machine which moves and acts as it is moved and acted upon by the Divine Afflatus. He does not necessarily understand all that he himself writes; much

of it, indeed, is of such a nature that he cannot understand it any more than anyone else. He is a mere instrument upon which the Heavenly Musician plays; a pipe through which extranatural knowledge flows. This view of the subject has been practically abandoned; none but the most stubbornly ignorant holding to it any more. But it is eloquent of bygone possibilities of human credulity that it was once the received opinion and that there are yet extant in the libraries and second-hand book stalls volumes in defense of such a conception of "plenary inspiration."

In the other case—that of psychical or dynamic inspiration—the mortal writer is invested with somewhat more of human identity. He is no longer a mere steam engine but a thinking man, retaining personal characteristics but so dominated by the Divine Mind that he writes only what is suggested to him.

He may clothe the matter in his own garment of words and invest it with his own literary style, if he has any, but he, nevertheless, writes only what is given him to write, and is so controlled by the Divine One that what he writes is truth and truth only, and is infallible, for the double reason that it *is* truth (though it must be confessed that, in certain quarters, and among a certain class of minds, Truth, for its own sake, has never been reckoned a sufficient authority) and that it is uttered by an inspired penman.

In either case inspiration is called "plenary" and places the writer in the position of a voice or pen for God. The productions of such a writer are the "Word of God." Revelation thus imparted is absolute truth and discussion is only permissible as to what is revealed. Once decide that and discussion ends. Reason and will must bow to it

as to God Himself; a demand that is right and imperative if we admit that the man who writes is really the voice of God; is really fully inspired.

Perhaps that view of inspiration which is now most generally accepted among thinking people who hold to the traditional doctrine of inspiration is one which has not yet found definite formulation, owing to the hesitancy which characterizes the entrance of any innovation in religious thought. Leaders of religious thought are conservative, partly because conservation is safe and wise, apart from personal considerations, and partly because heresy is expensive and dangerous. They are usually those who live by the favor of Ecclesiasticism, which is impatient of novelties whose tendency is toward its own decay and disruption. Men will change their minds, however, though slowly and at heavy price. They are doing so in regard of this subject

and there are probably at this time few among the most highly educated and thoughtful of the clergy who hold to what may fairly be called plenary inspiration. It is coming to be admitted that there are degrees of inspiration probable, perhaps apparent, in all the sacred writings. All are inspired but this not to such a degree as that; Solomon's Song not to the extent of the Epistle to the Romans; Solomon himself not to the extent of Paul. It is even questioned whether there is the same need for inspiration in the recording of plain historical facts which may be obtained by ordinary research as in the enunciation of mysteries which appertain to the unknown. History gives up its recorded facts to any painstaking student, but there are declarations in various portions of the Scripture which, if true, could only have been known by God, or one to whom God revealed

them. "In My Father's house are many mansions." God only knows that. If he who said it was God it is, indeed, true. If God spoke through him who said it, it is true. But if he was only man, no amount of investigation or experiment could ever discover such a fact. He could not possibly know such a thing. Supposing it to be true, it was discovered by a degree of inspiration for which we cannot understand the necessity in the case of a plain statement of fact quite within the range of ordinary human experience, which one may know as well as another.

But the vital question, that which underlies the whole subject, is deeper far than this of degree; it is as to whether inspiration, as commonly understood, is possible or probable upon any terms. Why discuss degrees when it is gravely doubtful whether the kind exists in any degree. Does God, or did

God, ever communicate with any man, except as He communicates with all men? Is there any such fact as revelation, as commonly understood? Are there any possible or probable channels of communication between Divinity and Humanity other than the senses, the mind, and the conscience, and these in their ordinary operation? Are we justified in believing that God has ever spoken, or does now speak, to a few men in a manner which He does not employ toward all men? Is it credible that anything was ever revealed to one man, or a few men, which might not have been thought out, discovered or inferred by another man or set of men, given the same quantity and quality of intellect and the same amount of leisure and other facilities for study and reflection?

It is hazardous for any finite creature, perhaps impertinent, to confident-

ly affirm what is or is not possible in this mysterious universe. I, certainly, would not dare to assert that inspiration is an impossibility; that if God chose He could not and would not communicate with man in any way He pleased, and to whatever man or men He pleased. It is not, however, so much a question of possibility as probability. All things are possible with God but all things are not probable; and while it is possible it is not probable that God ever acted any differently in his dealings with mankind than he does at this present time. It is an old saying that we are to judge the future by the past; as old as Confucius, perhaps older; and it is a wise saying. I believe it is just as wise that we judge the past by the present. What is common to human experience now was probably always so. It requires no argument to con-

vince any one that no one is inspired now. The man who makes such a claim only subjects himself to ridicule, and that too, among those who firmly believe that some men have been inspired.

It is now nearly two thousand years since the last inspired man passed away from this earth, according to the belief of Christendom, though Mahommedendom would shorten this period some centuries. And yet mankind was never in more need of some clear manifestation from the unseen than now, and, I may say, never so well prepared to understand any message which might be communicated. Mind was never so developed as now; observation was never so keen; moral sense never so receptive, so intelligently sensitive. There never has been, in short, a time in all the history of this world as we are able to spell that history out, when a revela-

tion could be so appropriately and hopefully made as just at this present. Yet there is none. The most pious and sincere Christian may find himself hag-ridden with doubts, until agonized cries are wrung from his distressed soul; cries for some little crumb or scrap of revelation to him, some single drop of water to cool his throbbing brain and fevered heart. But the heavens are brass, God is dumb; He says nothing, does nothing, though His creature end in bedlam; nothing, that is, of the nature of a special revelation to him. He leaves him as he leaves all others to learn of Him in the appointed ways of nature. Wickedness stalks abroad; Lechery tracks its victims; Injustice sits enthroned; Worldliness gnaws at the very heart of Conscience; Might crushes Right; the whole habitable world seems whirling in some Devil's dance of death; He, nevertheless, does nothing, says

nothing out of the ordinary course of things; enough in the ordinary course, to satisfy a really pious mind, but nothing out of it. There is as much need every way for revelation in one period of history as another, in this period as any other whatsoever. Yet, now for nineteen centuries there has been not a syllable.

It will not do to say the revelation given then and before then by the several writers of Scripture is and ought to be sufficient, for such arguments only satisfy those who wish to believe — not the truth, but whatever is told them upon authority. And, too, that revelation is manifestly not enough to satisfy all minds; among those who are still asking questions there being some of the strongest, noblest and devoutest in all that goes for basic religion. It is impossible to understand why inspira-

tion should appertain to one age or one man and not another.

It is true, indeed that a fact should not be doubted or denied merely because it is inexplicable, but in this case the fact is not only not proven but is of such a nature that its demonstration is impossible. If a man is inspired his condition can only be known to himself. He can only declare it to another; not in any way prove it. In the very nature of the case whatever revelation he may have had, supposing him to have had any, can only be revelation to himself. alone. When he declares it to another it becomes hearsay — not what God says but what he says that God says, believable or not as we choose, since be both parties never so willing he cannot by any possibility prove his inspiration. He can only assert it. His revelations cannot be put in evidence, because there is no possible way of de-

termining the truth or falsity of them; or whether, if true, they are not merely clever guesses or at best the intuitions of genius.

It is curious, that the men who are supposed to have been inspired almost never, if, indeed, ever, made any such claim for themselves. They have been invested with inspiration by succeeding generations, or if by their own, only in a very superstitious age. Should a man make such a claim for himself now there would be no better proof of his imposture asked; he would be immediately considered, without argument or hesitation, self-deluded, insane, or a charlatan. The authorship of the Old Testament writings is so uncertain that it is impossible to say that any prophet or writer ever claimed to be inspired, but it is quite certain that no such high dignity is assumed by the New Testament writers for their writings, far less for

themselves, except in the book of Revelation — one of the most doubtful authenticity. If any New Testament writer was inspired it will he admitted that Paul was, since he was the greatest among them and deals with the most difficult and abstruse subjects in the most affirmative manner. Yet he makes no such claim for himself, or none which is indubitably so. If he had we should be obliged to accept his mere word for it; but, apparently, he has not. Probably all the New Testament writings were read at first, by those to whom they were written with no suspicion of their being inspired. Were not the men who wrote them known and abused among them? But in a century or so they began to be considered inspired, just as Peter (and others) reckoned the Old Testament inspired when he wrote his epistle, without assuming such Divine authority for his own production any more

than I for what I am now writing. He believed it to be the truth as I do this. Nothing more. By-and-by, however, it was decided by others, long after Peter was dead and gone, to be inspired, and so, not the word of Peter, but the Word of God. For centuries there was dispute as to which of the early Christian writings were inspired and which not, a question that is, to this day, unsettled, some of Peter's own writings, or alleged writings, being still in doubt. Upon such a question there ought to be no shadow of doubt or uncertainty, instead of which there is no kind of certainty. We do not and cannot know that any of our sacred writings are inspired and if any are it seems impossible, with all our critical learning, to decide which. It is all, at best, a matter of human judgment, and, unfortunately, not the best judgment, since it is warped by doctrinal beliefs, which unquestionably entered largely into

the formation of the canon in so far as it is indubitably formed. Certain early Christian writings were once believed to be inspired which are not only stupid and silly in many passages but which contain egregious fables. They were finally thrown out, indeed, but the age and grade of culture and intelligence which admitted them for a time was practically the same which decided the question of inspiration for the remaining current Scriptures. The early Christians were the sternest moralists of their time, be it said to their high praise, but they were neither the most intelligent of their age, nor freest from superstition; they were practically without critical faculty or training. Every human product must submit to human criticism and take its final place at the dictation of criticism, and since the Scripture books escaped this test in the beginning they must submit to

it sooner or later, the later being not far away.

One insuperable objection to the doctrine of Biblical inspiration lies in the character of much of the writing. It abounds with manifest myths and legends, quite analagous to those which appertain to other ancient history and the development of other religions. There is no essential difference between the writings of the Hebrews as to their historic quality and those of other nations which are freely admitted by Christendom to be fabulous. The conclusion would, therefore, seem to be irresistible that if one class of authors were inspired another precisely similar class must be accorded the same honor when it is claimed with the same earnestness and upon the same grounds. To hold that the writings upon which our religious faith is founded are genuine revelation while

those of all other religions are spurious is to do exactly what the adherents of those other religions do and with just as little reason. It is highly improbable that among many religious writings belonging to different ages of the world and to different nationalities, each precisely resembling the other in essential particulars, only one set should be Divinely inspired, the others all being base and fraudulent imitations produced by the cunning of a priestly class for motives of personal gain and with consciousness of the hypocritical cheat practiced upon the unsuspecting multitudes. It is more probable that all those records of the infancy of nations and the development of religion which constitute the Bibles of all peoples are the compilations of legends which were implicitly believed by priests and people alike at the time of their committal to paper or tablets.

Nations like individuals have no recollection of their days of infancy, their formative period, and the only history they have is that which is transmitted from generation to generation in the form of legends which assume an extra-natural character because they relate to a period known only to the imagination and whose events and characters afford, therefore, free scope for Wonder. There is no philosophic ground for the supposition that the Hebrew people were free from the operation of natural law in recording their history, that they were guided into the truth to the extent of rendering their historical documents infallible. And, furthermore, an examination of those records reveals a multitude of stories which bear every evidence of legend and which in some instances are necessarily untrue. Those of the garden of Eden, the Flood, the lives of the Patriarchs, the Exodus

from Egypt, and many other similar ones are plainly legendary, while the account of the Creation, the cruise of the Ark, the crossing of the Red sea, and many other such records which are given as sober history are not only improbable but simply impossible and therefore untrue. If the record is not true of course it is not inspired. Such stories if written to-day would not be considered for a moment except to excite ridicule.

We have, for instance, in the book of Exodus, the record of the march of an army or, rather, the emigration of a nation, from Egypt into the wilderness. We are there told that upwards of six hundred thousand warriors over twenty years of age marched forth, together with their women and children and a mixed multitude which must have been quite numerous to have been considered worthy of any notice. By the usual

methods of computing population this company of liberated slaves would amount to quite three millions of people. Apart from the impossibility of such rapid increase in population as this number would indicate, from the original seventy souls who went down into Egypt, during the comparatively short time which they must have remained there, the impossibility remains of such a multitude escaping as they are said to have done in a single night. A perusal of the story shows that Moses gave notice to all the people to flee; that the women borrowed (with no intention of ever returning them) quantities of jewelry from their Egyptian mistressess; that the people were gathered and the flight from Egypt was actually accomplished all in a single night. Now, to say nothing of the moving of such a multitude in so short a time, we know very well that without the aid of some such

instrumentality as the telegraph it would be quite impossible for Moses to transmit an order of any kind of intelligence to such a vast number of people ; almost as many as the population of the city of London and scatterred over a far wider district. It would have required weeks with the facilities which Moses had at command to make known Pharaoh's final decision to the people and summon them to flight.

Afterward this vast multitude are made to cross an arm of the Red sea in a single night — a physical impossibility. We may judge how impossible such a feat was if we remember that when Napoleon crossed the river Niemen in 1812 it required three days and nights to transmit his forces over three bridges in close order, though there were only about two hundred and thirty thousand of them, all under that discipline which we know the Israelites did not have

and which would certainly contribute to the expedition of such an enterprise.

Whatever else may be said of such stories and whatever may be their use (they doubtless have a use) it is impossible to believe them; we know they are not true however much we may try to make ourselves believe them, as doubtless many do, through a superstitious dread of doubting anything that is found in the Bible, however absurd or incredible. Whatever is true in the Bible, as in any other book, needs no inspiration to enforce it. Truth is strong enough to win its own way. And whatever is untrue not only cannot be made credible by investing it with the authority of inspiration, but its manifest untruthfulness destroys any such claim. We must suppose the moral order of the universe gone all to chaos before we can believe that any untruth was ever given to this world by Divine in-

spiration, that God ever revealed what was not a veritable fact. Much that is in the Bible is true; true to fact, true to history and true to human nature. And it is for this reason that the book has retained its hold upon so large a portion of the race of man and probably always will be the best of books to pious humanity. But it may as well be admitted by those who cherish the Bible that it contains, as well, much that is not true, particularly in its historical portions.

If the argument adduced above is not sufficient to throw the received doctrine of inspiration into the region of extreme improbability there remains another which may be added and which weighs in the same direction.

We have a right to expect that those who write under the inspiration of God's spirit will give us a true conception of the Divine nature; in a book which

claims or has the claim made for it, that it is God's Word, we may reasonably look for a uniformly exalted conception of the Divine One. But in the Bible this expectation is not realized. The God of the Hebrews, the Jehovah of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who liberated the Israelites from Egypt and who went with them to their partial conquest of Canaan is a stern, unlovable, cruel, unjust and immoral being; jealous of his own glory, vindictive and revengeful, not to mention the gross anthropomorphism with which he is at times embodied. No enlightened, spiritual mind can possibly believe that God ever walked the earth, conversing and eating with men as he is said to have done in the Old Testament, particularly in the instance of his partaking of Abraham's hospitality in the eighteenth chapter of Genesis. That God has the members of a human body and is subject to

the passions of the human mind is only believable by those who are half savages, or, if you please, who are in a childlike state of spiritual culture. The conception of God which we have in the Old Testament is precisely such as we get from other half-civilized people but is not such as to suggest that it was derived through the inspiration of God himself. He connives again and again at fraud and sometimes encourages his servants to the perpetration of acts which are more than questionable, which are immoral and occasionally hideously inhuman.

Righteousness of character is not presented as the one desirable and imperative motive of human life in the Hebrew records but, instead, the favor of Jehovah. Hence Abraham and Isaac are made to prosper in two instances in their histories (which, by-the-way, are suspiciously similar) at the expense of a

heathen king, though the patriarchs, in order to save their lives, which they supposed to be endangered, resorted to miserable lies, imperilling the virtue of their wives, while the heathen rulers in each case acted magnanimously in the extreme toward them; merely to show how important it is, not to do right, but to have the favor of Jehovah. The good man suffers and the bad man prospers, notwithstanding his badness, because he is the servant of Jehovah. Joseph's splendid career in Egypt is all attributed to the circumstance that God was with him looking after his fortunes; yet Joseph was far from being a good man; was, indeed, a very bad man, at least in so far as his public life was concerned. He was one of the most hateful of tyrants, whose public policy resulted in the enslavement of the entire population of Egypt to the King. The wisdom which devised the

horrible scheme is not only praised but is directly attributed to Jehovah, who wanted to make Joseph a great man and provide succor for his servant Jacob and his family when they were driven into Egypt by famine.

Later on when Israel becomes a nation this immoral God becomes a bloodthirsty one, and the story of the making of Israel is streaked with blood shed at the command of Jehovah; the blood of men, women and children who were guilty of nothing but occupying territory which Jehovah desired for his own people. Of course these stories and many others like them are not true as they are told, but it is quite plain that writers who could invest God with such a character were not inspired penmen. There is nothing about such records to suggest inspiration and everything to conflict with it.

I know what is said to meet this difficulty; that in revealing Himself God ac-

commodated His message to the limit of man's civilization and spiritual culture. But such a defence is idle. This is to suppose that God is a kind of infinite Jesuit who inspired men to write lies which were to pass for truth until such time as the race became sufficiently enlightened to discover their falsity. If God could do this He would be as bad as the old Hebrews make Him out and much more foolish, because it ought to be quite plain that men could never learn to reverence and love a being who had deliberately deceived the whole world for thousands of years as to his own character, merely because if he told them the whole truth (which they were not prepared to receive) they would believe none of it.

It is much more natural to suppose that the Hebrew race like all others began at first with a very unworthy conception of God which grew at last into the purest

and truest monotheism which any nation had ever thought out, though it never reached the highest possible conception, except, perhaps, in a few of the rapt utterances of the psalmists or prophets. The Jehovah of the Jews was a product of their own brains who naturally thought, felt and acted very much as they themselves did; he was simply a reflection of themselves upon a large scale. It is well known that our conception of God follows the grade of our own thinking. We invest him to an infinite degree with those qualities which seem to us most admirable. A warlike people always have a warlike God; but as the amenities of life prevail and justice and morality increasingly dominate society our conception of God will correspondingly modify itself. God evolves man who in turn creates for himself God; that is to say, through the course of the ages man works his way toward the

truth about God. It is unreasonable to suppose that the Hebrews alone were exempt from the operation of this law. It is admitted by the most orthodox Christian that this is what takes place among heathen peoples. It is probably what took place among the Hebrews, as well. Until some positive external evidence to the contrary is produced and while the internal evidence of the writings themselves is so persistently in this direction it seems reasonable, at least, to suppose so.

These reflections are, of course, by no means exhaustive, nor were they intended to be, but, together with the entire range of inquiry which this subject opens, they are sufficient to indicate the improbability of there ever having been any revelation from God to man other than that which is open to every man with the aid of the senses, reason and conscience; the im-

probability that any one was ever inspired, unless extraordinary spiritual intuitions may be dignified with the name of inspiration.

In this sense, that certain men have been more highly endowed with spiritual perceptions than others and more inclined to realize truth in their personal experiences, inspiration — revelation — is a profound truth which will probably always be believed by men; no doubt it will grow more and more believable. This may well be supposed to be the central truth which underlies the universal belief in Divine revelation through the special inspiration of particular individuals. It is safe and reasonable to accord respectful attention to any belief which is found among all people and in all ages. It will not be generally possible to accept it in its traditional form but it is highly probable that a universal superstition

is the index to some truth to which it will be found to bear a kind of resemblance.

To what extent it is possible for any man to believe himself inspired is a question for debate, but it is quite in accord with the religious nature of man, which delights in authority in matters of faith, to ascribe extranatural powers of intelligence to its leading lawgivers and teachers. Laws and maxims evolved out of the teacher's mind and experience are subject to criticism and so will become unstable; it is always the policy of those, therefore, who are interested in the fixity of traditions to ascribe their origin to extranatural agencies. Zoroaster, the prophet of the Persians, is supposed by his followers, and it is so claimed by their sacred writings, to have derived his religious doctrines from Ahuramazda, the God of Light. The Egyptian God Thoth, "the lord of the

divine word" is always represented with a writing tablet and a pencil in his hand, and from him the priests, who were the lawgivers and religious teachers of the people, were thought to receive their knowledge. Zeus, the greatest of the Grecian Gods, was believed to have placed the laws of Crete in a cave at the summit of mount Dicte, where they were found by Minos, his son and friend, who gave them to the people. Lycurgus, the Spartan lawgiver, obtained his laws from Apollo. To the nymph Egeria the Roman legends ascribe all the wisdom of Numa Pompilius, the popular instructor. In precisely the same manner, and it is difficult to understand with what more of veracity, Moses receives his laws from Jehovah. Nor does it surprise us to discover that so many centuries later Mohammed declares that every page of the Koran was dictated by the angel Gabriel; and he, too, finds

an imitator in our own day in the Mahdi. It seems captious to declare all these beliefs absurd except in the case of Moses, when to an open mind they are all exactly similar in kind. And, on the other hand, it appears equally unphilosophical to assert that there is no real fact hinted at in the circumstance of so many analogous legends growing up among people who were not affected in this matter by intercourse with each other; who formed their beliefs in independence of each other. Doubtless there is a fact here which will be most acceptable to every truly pious person, which is that certain highly gifted individuals are favored with revelations of truth to a far greater degree than most others but nothing different in kind from that which is possible to every one who has reason to perceive and understand, a conscience morally susceptible to and a heart which loves

the truth. Zoroaster, Confucius, the Buddha, Socrates, Moses, and above all, not in kind but degree, JESUS, were all highly inspired men, but in all their revelations there was probably nothing of the extranatural.

What then, it will be asked, is the value of such a Book as the Bible considered as an authority in religious matters? As an extranatural and therefore infallible guide — none. Doubtless such a conclusion will be very shocking to those who are accustomed to depend upon some sort of ecclesiastical, or other human authority, in forming their religious opinions, but it will be attended with no alarm to all who reverence truth itself as its own highest and wholly sufficient authority. As a book which contains much that is strictly true and much more that is of the nature of truthful symbolism; even more may be

said: as the book which above all others has imparted to the race the highest conception of God and the purest morality (as the expression of his service) it has won a position in the reverence of that portion of mankind which is familiar with it, which it will, doubtless, always maintain, since, probably, its moral and spiritual teachings will never be surpassed. It is preëminently the record of the religious life of men in precept and experience. It is the book of human nature, containing the ~~highest~~ some thoughts which men have ever had about God and the spiritual realm and the record of the noblest living which has ever been accomplished, and in the case of Jesus, which probably ever will be seen. The book is not so much itself inspired as it is the account of the sayings and doings of men who, in the only sense in which inspiration can be considered

a reality, were. It is therefore, not without reason called a "living word." It bears a relation to human life and breathes the spirit of human beings — allying itself to the heart of man — as none of the other great religious writings does. The other sacred books of the East — the Zoroastrian and Brahmanical — are masses of dreamy myths and transcendental speculations which are possibly apprehended only by a few and these confined to special localities. The religious traditions of the Greeks present for belief and worship a combined system of deified beauty and half roistering child's play; quite adapted to the free, out of door life which was natural in the delicious climate of Greece, but almost wholly without morality and not practicable in other latitudes and under different forms of civilization. In so far as the Romans had any religion, among the great

number of their Gods, it was legal and utilitarian, adapted only to the Romans themselves. The ancient Egyptian beliefs were in many respects admirable, particularly in moral precepts, but were at best a complicated system of mystical mythology, well calculated for the maintenance of a priestly cult, but with little appeal to human nature as such. Confucianism is a remarkable but cold system of morality, not a religion at all; Buddhism, a Christian-like paganism, is defective in hope — so necessary to human life; and even the Koran is artificial in its arrangement and presents in the place of a real God a lifeless, bloodless, overruling Fate which is capable of driving men into a reckless disregard of life but furnishes little impulse toward character. The Bible, on the other hand, while it is not a book of authentic history, embraces a multitude

of records which have to do with human life, which grew up around the movements of men, either individuals or tribes, which are legends with some kind of historical basis and not mere nature myths.

There is much in all sacred writings that is interesting to the thoughtful; they are all the growths of man's mind, but the Hebrew and Christian writings are almost purely human records, and in accordance with that saying of Goethe that "man is properly the only object that interests man," they appeal to the mind and to the heart as well. In the biographies of the Patriarchs, whether they be considered as individuals or tribal incarnations; or of Moses, the Prophets, Apostles and, above all, Jesus, we look at ourselves as in a glass. It is human life under different conditions from our own, but it is human life; the old old story of love, hate, ambition, selfishness; and,

happily, generosity, goodness, self-devotion to duty and religion; individual life, home life, social life, but always human life. The Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job are all books to which the inner life of men responds; the various books of prophecy, or better still, the biographical notices of the great reformer prophets themselves, suggest analogies in every other political history in their ebb and flow of public righteousness; they are books of reference for the law makers and statesmen of all ages; the epistles of the New Testament open and discuss the world-old problems of religious thought: God, immortality, the future, man in his relations to man and to all that is outside of himself in time and eternity. The book as a whole is the manual of human nature and experience and for that reason, if for no other, appeals to men as no other ever did or probably will.

There is, too, another value found in the quality of its moral and religious teaching. All the sacred books of the world possess a certain value and have swayed the vast multitudes which have adopted them by the power of the truth contained in them. Error, pure and simple, has no lasting power and it is foolish to suppose that what we call pagan religions have held their sway merely by the cunning of priests. They are all natural growths and have been received because of the truth which they brought. The reason why they have failed as world religions (Buddhism alone being a proselyting faith, and it only to a limited degree) is because of the special, limited and comparatively unsatisfactory nature of their spiritual morality. Many of the finest sentiments of the Bible, even those uttered by Jesus himself, are found in the writings of pagans who never heard of the Bible.

Some of the Scriptural doctrines have been borrowed from Egypt and Persia, perhaps from other sources as well. But what is exceptional in paganism is dominating in Scripture, and what is a mere aphorism in the mouth of Confucius is instinct with life upon the lips of Jesus. Life is a subtle quality which cannot be explained but may be possessed. It doubtless requires what may be called a spiritual sense to apprehend such a distinction as the one just made, but it is real, nevertheless. There is a subtle quality in the Scripture writings, more particularly in some of them, which finds men, holds them and impels them to noble living. It is this high quality, manifested more particularly in the personality of the men whose histories are related in Scripture which has elicited remarkable testimony from those who were total unbelievers in the extranatural origin or character of the book.

Goethe declares that the morality of the Bible will never be surpassed and that the Christian conception of life is so exalted that if once fairly apprehended one can never again be what he was without it. John Stewart Mill concluded that if men must have religion they could do no better than to choose Jesus as their leader, and considered that the highest standard of human conduct which would elicit the approval of Jesus. Carlyle believed the Bible and Shakespeare to be the best two books and spent much time in his later life reading the former of these, declaring that there was much the same effect upon him from it as when he believed it to be an extranatural production. And though an entire believer in absolute inspiration, Moody, the evangelist, has expressed one of the strongest possible arguments for the essential worthfulness of the venerable and thrice precious

collection of writings: "I believe the Bible is inspired because it inspires me."

Many minds are so constituted or have been so biased by education that to cast the slightest doubt upon the Book as actual Revelation is to destroy the value of it entirely. If one part of it is not true none of it is. If the whale did not swallow Jonah then there is no authority in the Golden Rule. Nothing, to such people, is inspired and consequently authoritative because it is true; but anything is supposed to be true, no matter how absurd or incredible, if they can be made to believe that it is inspired, and the more marvelous and impossible any statement the more ready are they to believe it inspired. To such the line of thought traced in the preceding pages is nothing short of blank infidelity; nor can they be brought to believe that a sacred volume may be partly true and partly un-

true. To them it is presumption to dare to decide in a sacred book what is true and what is not; the idea of subjecting such a work to criticism, or bringing it to the test of the common consciousness, is little short of the horrid blasphemy of some Pompey who pulls aside the vail of the Temple of Jehovah to see if there is anything behind there, and if anything—what? But there are others who reverence truth for its own sake, who love it wherever it is found and who know that it is no more to be discovered in the writings of men unmixed with error than is gold apart from all baser accompaniments or diamonds already cut and polished. To them the Bible is a precious possession because of the divine truth which it contains and whose very errors contribute to its worth, because they were not inserted with intent to deceive but are such as mankind naturally falls into in

an earnest search after truth. Its legends are dignified, not one of them being puerile though some are ridiculously extravagant; its miracles are free from fantastic or grotesque elements. It is a record of the development of the most religious people on earth, and their growth from fetichism through polytheism and nature worship up to the noblest monotheism is attended by just such fumbling after the truth, without always finding it, which we ought naturally to expect.

The Bible, then, is an authority in religious matters not because it is extranaturally inspired but because it is true—true to human nature and experience even in its errors.

MIRACLES.

ALMOST every discussion of miracles opens with a difinition of the term miracle, an attempt to describe exactly what a miracle is. Such efforts are apt to end in little more than confusion of thought. To the ordinary mind, to those who are not obliged to have accurate definitions, those who are not skilled in and care nothing for the science of word gymnastics, it is safe to leave the subject of this chapter without precise definition. In a general way we may suppose ourselves understood when we use the term miracle, without a lengthy disquisition as to the relations of the extranatural to the natural and an exact bounding of these

two realms. Miracles are certain marvelous performances involving apparently abnormal operations in nature and which are commonly supposed to indicate the presence and activity of extranatural agencies; such, for instance, as the command of the elements — Moses smiting the Red sea and causing the waters to stand up in walls on either side of a causeway, and Jesus rebuking a storm into quietude; hastening the ordinary operations of nature — changing water into wine; commanding obedience from animals—drawing fish into a net in great quantities or bringing a specific one to hook in order that money contained in its stomach might be obtained to satisfy the tax-gatherer; healing the sick, raising the dead. Many such marvels are related in the Bible and other religious books. They grow up around famous religious characters and follow the development of religious systems and organ-

izations. They are peculiar to no age or people, but are the universal accompaniment of religion.

The pressing question is not which of the many thousands that are recorded are true and which are false, but as to the probability of any of them being true. All religious people are accustomed to believe in miracles which are wrought in the interest of their own faith or for the accrediting of their own religious teachers as messengers from God and to deny the reality of all others, that is, those which are wrought by the leaders of other faiths for the same demonstrative purposes. With them it is not a question of miracles or no miracles but only of which miracles were real and which were impostures. Christians easily discredit the miracles of other religions as others deny those of Christians. Protestants will not admit the actuality of Roman Catholic miracles but brand them as "idle and

ridiculous stories which the Romanists tell concerning their saints and other persons, in order to support the credit of their religion." Such is the definition of legends in Hook's "Church Dictionary," which will fairly express the attitude of one religious party toward another upon this subject. It does not occur to these various religionists that the arguments which are so destructive of the claims of opposing wonder workers from *their* standpoint are equally forcible against *all* such claims from the standpoint of an unbiased mind; but so it is. Hence the broad question is as to the probability of miracles at all.

I use the word probability rather than possibility for the reason already given with reference to revelation: the subject is one which necessarily transcends the range of human experience and is therefore ill-adapted to affirmations and negations. It is something about which we

can know nothing. We dare not say that miracles are possible for reasons which will presently appear. We equally dare not say that they are impossible because we do not know how far Divine Will may intrude upon the usual course of nature nor do we know how far such wonders are possible to the ordinary forces of nature, without the necessity of postulating Divine interposition. The famous argument of David Hume, that miracles are not credible because they contradict all human experience and observation, is not conclusive for the reason that human experience is continually broadening and so many new possibilities are observable that no one can fix the limit of such phenomena. We know so little of natural force or forces, notwithstanding we know so much, that we dare not dogmatize as to their possible operations. Hume declares that no amount of testimony of whatever qual-

ity is sufficient to prove a miracle. We can not fairly say that. We can only question whether such testimony *as we have* is sufficient to establish the actuality of an occurrence which is so extremely improbable.

It is not so much a question of what may or may not be established by any possible testimony as what has been proven by the testimony which is already in. If a sea captain declares that he saw on his last voyage a sea serpent with a tiger's head, vampire wings, crocodile feet and the body of a snake as large as an elephant and of enormous length, we do not say the thing is inconceivable for there may be monsters of the deep which have never been described by the naturalists; but we say the ocurrence is so highly improbable as to render it incredible except upon evidence absolutely irrefragable. It would require to be seen by a great many persons at different times

and under circumstances which would permit of the severest experiment, the clearest apprehension of all the facts in the case; which would, in short, render deception or mistake impossible. And if the story is to be believed by future generations some provision would have to be made for the transmission of the history of the affair by absolutely unimpeachable documents, as to their truthfulness and their genuineness of authorship. However satisfactory the evidence may have been to the eyewitness and those to whom the original evidence was given, the least suspicion which might be cast upon the credibility or genuineness of the documents through which the evidence is transmitted to posterity would be sufficient ground for doubt.

If one declares that he saw a man raised from the dead he must be required to produce absolute evidence that

the man was dead and that he was actually brought to life in the manner related. We cannot say that such a performance is impossible because we do not know that it is. But it is so improbable that a candid mind will admit that the amount of evidence necessary to satisfy one that such a thing really occurred would have to be very great. It is doubtful if any amount of evidence would be sufficient to convince any one that such a miracle could be wrought in this period of the world's history and in our immediate midst. One could hardly be brought to believe the evidence of his own senses in such a case. How impossible is it, then, to lift miracles to the plane of probability by the imperfect testimony of history. The only evidence we have that any miracles were ever performed (except those which are supposed to occur now, as at Lourdes and Knock, in which nobody but the con-

fessedly deluded believe) is historical. How slight such evidence is need not be argued among those who understand the extreme difficulty of getting at any simple fact which happened only a little while ago; a difficulty which increases, of course, in proportion to the remoteness and improbability of the supposed occurrence. Who was the Man of the Iron Mask? What kind of person actually was Oliver Cromwell? A good man, a bad one, a hypocrite, a deluded one, or a little of all these? The testimony of historians, whose business it is to pry into archives among original documents is, without exception, that it is next to impossible to procure irrefragable evidence of anything belonging to the past; as, for example Jortin, who describes ecclesiastical history as an "enchanted wood, where it is hard to distinguish truth from falsehood, and whose maze requires more than an Ariadne's

clue." And when we know how difficult it is to establish the exactness of *any* occurrence, even from the testimony of eye-witnesses themselves, we are prepared to accept their statements in this regard.

"It is stated that when Leopold von Ranke began to collect facts for his History, a singular accident occurred in his native town. A bridge gave way one morning, and some persons were swept away in the current beneath. Von Ranke, who was absent at the time, on his return inquired into the details of the catastrophe. "I saw the bridge fall," said one of the neighbors. "A heavy wain had just passed ever it, and weakened it. Two women were on it when it fell, and a soldier on a white horse." "I saw it fall," declared another; "but the wain had passed over it two hours previous. The foot-passengers were children, and the rider was a civilian on a black horse." "Now," argued Von Ranke, "if it is impossible to learn the truth about an

accident which happened at broad noonday only twenty-four hours ago, how can I declare any fact to be certain which is shrouded in the darkness of ten centuries?"

History is not an exact science, at best, and it is only within a comparatively few years that any serious attempts have been made by historians to get at the truth. The histories which were accessible to us in our childhood, supposing us to be now in middle life, were lumbered with legendary lore, which constituted, indeed, the most interesting portion of the works and the most eagerly believed, perhaps, but which we have been doomed to see relegated to the limbo of exploded fables by the criticism of more exact and painstaking writers. We are loth to banish William Tell and Pocahontas, as they once lived in our imaginations, from the company of the actual and historical, but we are forced

to, nevertheless. And when we consider *ancient* history — the original material from which our great modern works are formed — we are in a region in which truth must be literally mined from the depths of mountains of untruth, where its proportion to lies is well-nigh infinitessimal.

At the time when the books of the Old Testament were written there was, properly speaking, no such thing as history; there were only legends; legend was history then. The books as they now stand were not written until hundreds of years, in many cases, after the events which they relate were supposed to have occurred; after the people whose lives are recorded had passed from the earthly scene. They must be classed with other ancient original documents and are of the same untrustworthy character considered as works of actual history. The books of the New Testament are largely

of the same character. Written much later than they are popularly supposed to have been (at least as much may be said of some of them) by men who are unknown to us, and who were removed from the scene portrayed, both by time and space; the historical portions being compilations of stories which had passed from mouth to mouth for a generation or two, possibly more; the didactic and doctrinal portions written in the heat of partisan discussion and for partisan purposes; they are worth little more than the Old Testament records as sober historical documents. To say nothing of the fundamental question of their inspiration, which has been already discussed, their authenticity and genuineness is seriously called into question. Not only is it not certain even to those who believe that *some* of them are inspired that they *all* are, but it is also not certain that some of them were written by those whose

names they bear and at the time which is claimed for them. What is certain is that they were all written in an age when it was not considered disgraceful for an author to ascribe his writing to a more famous hand in order to gain currency for it; that is to say, in an age when pious fraud was not only permissible but commendable.

It is not my purpose to detract from the real merits of any of the Sacred Writings, but only to show that they are comparatively worthless as historical documents and are especially unfit for use when evidence of the severest character is demanded, as in the case of alleged miracles. It is almost certain that those portions of the Bible which we call historical were not originally intended by their authors or compilers for history but rather for doctrinal instruction and admonition. We know, for instance, that the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and

Kings were called by those who collated them not historical books, as we consider them, but the "Former Prophets," while Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the minor prophecies were known as the "Latter Prophets." The former and the latter were alike written for spiritual instruction and warning. Historical events were all colored to suit a purpose. It can hardly be doubted that the historical books of the New Testament were written for a similar purpose. The gospel of John is so clearly of this character that it cannot be hidden from even a careless reader. It is just as plainly an argument and not a history as any of Paul's epistles.

Now, when a writer has a theory of events it is impossible for him to give them an impartial study and portrayal. They will be collated only with reference to their significance as carrying out his theory. If any happenings flatly contra-

dict his theory they will be omitted or explained away. All histories are more or less arguments; written for the purposes of argument. The Royalist Hume could not be expected to tell the truth about Cromwell and his companions. The whig Macauley writes, as it has been aptly said, as if he knew all along that the Tories would have a bad time of it. With the possible exception of Shakespeare's plays, wherein each party is allowed to state its own case, there are no impartial histories; none whose records can fairly be put in evidence for the support of so improbable an occurrence as a extranatural miracle.

If we could believe the Scriptures to be strictly inspired this objection would, of course, be invalidated. But, unfortunately, there is no such easy way out of the difficulty, because the internal as well as the external character of these writings is plainly similar to all other his-

tories. It is only what ought to be expected, considering the age in which they were produced, that they are not as painstaking and trustworthy as similar documents would be to-day. The careful investigation, for example, upon the actual field of action which preceded Carlyle's history of Frederick the Great is almost wholly wanting in Bible narrative; and the critical faculty by which facts are carefully examined as to their accuracy, is entirely absent. In its place we discover that habit of credulity in the writers which is fatal to history.

When the character of the evidence which would be necessary to establish a miracle at this present time is considered the above difficulties in the way of accepting that which is offered pertaining to a far distant time must be appreciated.

It is worth remarking that miracles are only possible among a people who are exceedingly superstitious or in an age

which is characterized by superstition. Where and when people believe in miracles as occurring among them they also believe in all sorts of extranatural manifestations. Fairies, brownies, banshees, witches and prodigies of all kinds go hand in hand with miracles; and there is quite as much evidence for any of them as for miracles. Naturally the ignorant and unthinking are most susceptible to all kinds of deception and illusion, but the fervor of conviction with which the most learned and substantial men of their day have accepted every grotesque human belief is as well-known as it is surprising. Learned divines of New England, as Cotton Mather; equally learned legal dignitaries of England, as Sir Matthew Hale, were firm believers in witchcraft. How careful we ought to be in accepting evidence is suggested by the fact that wise men whose lifelong habit was the sifting

of testimony and deciding cases purely from the evidence presented have been so egregiously deceived. What is any evidence worth in such matters as pertain to the extranatural if that upon which witches were burnt (often embracing the voluntary confessions of the poor wretches themselves) was so false, as it is now known to have been?

The weight of great minds in matters of opinion upon subjects which affect the extranatural is not much greater than that of the most ignorant and untrained, since any human mind is so susceptible to the influences of imagination as to render it liable to grave error in all such concerns. How strange it is that one so good and true, one so desirous to know the truth and one who so clearly loved it should have been permitted by the Spirit of Truth to believe and utter such words as these of John Henry Newman:

"I think it impossible to withstand the "evidence which is brought for the lique- "faction of the blood of St. Januarius at "Naples, or for the motion of the eyes of "the pictures of the Madonna in the Ro- "man States. I see no reason to doubt "the material of the Lombard Cross at "Monza, and I do not see why the Holy "Coat at Treves may not have been what "it professes to be. I firmly believe that "portions of the True Cross are at Rome "and elsewhere, that the crib of Jerusa- "lem is at Rome, and the bodies of St. "Peter and St. Paul; also, I firmly be- "lieve that the relics of the saints are "doing innumerable miracles and graces "daily. I firmly believe that before now "saints have raised the dead to life, "crossed the seas without vessels, mul- "tiplied grain and bread, cured innumer- "able diseases, and stopped the operations "of the laws of the universe in a multi- "tude of ways."

One who can speak such nonsense is not a safe guide where the due exercise of reason is esteemed. He was a good

man, worthy of all respect and affection but ridiculously in error; and he is therefore an instance of how other good men may be equally in error. That argument, such a favorite with many, that Jesus and the apostles were either what they claimed to be, or else vicious and depraved impostors has never appeared to me to have any force. Jesus and the apostles were the very best of men; but the best of men are not necessarily infallible. England never produced a purer and sweeter spirit than John Henry Newman, but he was childishly, absurdly mistaken in many of his opinions and beliefs.

But while the evidence for miracles is not strong enough to make it certain or even probable that the recorded miracles occurred as they are described, it is in the highest degree probable that the universal belief in miracles points toward the operation of remarkable forces in nature,

particularly in the mind of man. If miracles have never been wrought, some operations sufficiently similar to suggest them have probably been observed. Striking coincidences; remarkable doings in nature simultaneously with analogous movements among men; phenomenal personal and mental powers displayed by extraordinary characters; such things are of continual occurrence and have always been, and are doubtless the basis of the widespread belief in the extranatural manipulation of natural forces which characterizes all religions. When we read the Bible it is impossible to believe that all the marvels that are recorded actually happened — that the sun stood still for an entire day in order that an obscure chieftain in a little corner of the earth might win a battle in which he was in the wrong and his enemies in the right; that the waters of the Jordan were cut off, the upper portion standing up as a wall while

the lower portion flowed down to the Dead sea to allow a horde of merciless invaders to enter a smiling land for the purpose of desolating it; that boys, men, and women were raised from the dead; that little children were devoured by bears at the command of a great and good prophet of God merely because they poked fun at him, a thing which children have done from time immemorial, and which has been endured by their elders many times with no thought of revenge; and many other such stories — but it is just as impossible to believe that nothing of the kind ever happened. Probably nothing extranatural ever happened, but something extraordinary sometimes did, and does.

Nor are we driven to the belief that all such wonders or any of them, necessarily, were the result of those clumsy tricks which were performed by the Greek, Roman and Egyptian priests for

the purpose of galvanizing dead or dying faiths into a semblance of life when doubt was taking the place of belief and priestcraft was a mere trade. There is a deeper and more dignified explanation of them. That very scientific study which has revealed so largely the operation of the forces of nature as to make it easy to believe that every marvel whatsoever is capable of explanation upon the basis of nature, and whose only harmful effect is that it has almost undermined all belief in the unknown by destroying the element of wonder and rendering surprise almost a stranger to the human mind—we are no longer surprised at anything which man operating on nature accomplishes — that very habit of inquiry which has cleared away so many mysteries has opened the door upon others just as great, though we no longer think of them as other than natural. Who dares to say what may not be accom-

plished by natural force? A few years ago a tremor was observed to traverse a comet's tail millions of miles long in a fraction of second, yet there is no known law by which force may be transmitted through matter with anything like an approach to such speed. The instantaneous transmission of sound through a telephone wire also transcends all known laws of acoustics. Who can describe the limit of the operation of mind upon matter. All that is claimed for mesmerism, clairvoyance, spiritualism, hypnotism, faith cure, mind cure, is not true, but perhaps something is true in that line which has not yet been fathomed. No extranatural powers are at work but some powers are perhaps in operation in or through particular persons which are not generally possessed. The indications are that it is possible for some human beings under peculiar and, as yet, unknown conditions to extra-

ordinarily influence and control, organic and inorganic matter as others cannot. Thoreau would lie still in his boat with his hand submerged in the water and fish would get into his palm and allow themselves to be taken out of the water and fondled; or if he chose to recline under the trees wild creatures — birds, squirrels and other — came about him upon friendly and familiar terms. Hawthorne plainly indicates such phenomena when he makes his Donatello able to call wild inhabitants of the forest about him. And he strikes a still more significant note, a deeper vein of truth, when Donatello admits that he could never do this *after he had become contaminated by sin.* The intimation here is (and was it not by a kind of inspiration?) that this occult power is in some mysterious manner associated with *moral purity* in him who possesses it and is operative in proportion to the ratio of exaltation of character.

Miracles, considered as extranatural disturbances of the nature of things are less and less credible, but extraordinary occurrences, as the expression of the power of spiritual humanity over that which is less spiritual and over matter and force are more believable to-day than ever before.

Upon such a basis it is easy to believe that while Jesus probably did not perform all the wonders which are attributed to him in the manner in which they are recorded he did many marvellous works — particularly in the healing of diseases — sufficiently like those to afford some sort of ground for the stories as they stand. That the accounts are just such exaggerations as always occur in similar biographies of religious heroes is more than probable but that there actually was some foundation for the stories is just as probable.

It would be out of place to discuss particular miracles in a brief and general treatment of the subject such as this. The supreme miracle of all, however, calls for a few words, at least. It will always be impossible for some persons to believe that any one was ever brought bodily to life or rose to bodily life after he was actually dead. That Elijah or Elisha, Peter or Paul, as they are said to have done, really brought dead persons to life; or that the son of the widow of Nain and the brother of Mary and Martha, though decomposition was far advanced, were restored from the grave to their friends by Jesus, are statements which will be always subject to doubt even by those who have the profoundest reverence for all concerned and the book in which the events are recorded. Difficult, too, is it to believe that Jesus actually arose from the dead after being crucified,

even by those who are proud to be ranked among his followers. That he rose from the dead as supposed is incredible but that nothing extraordinary happened out of which this story was woven is equally, perhaps more, incredible. The arguments against such an actual occurrence are so convincing that it is well-nigh impossible to believe that it ever happened; but, at the same time, the evidence that something extraordinary occurred either external to or within the minds of some of the apostles is strong. The one significant fact is before us that after the crucifixion the apostles and disciples were utterly demoralized; they had gone back to their various occupations and had apparently given up all their hopes that Jesus was he who should deliver Israel from her enemies and her sins. But, suddenly, we find these disciples transformed from desponding and disappoint-

ed men into hopeful enthusiasts; from cowards who were not ashamed to desert their Master in the hour of his supreme peril to fearless zealots scouring the habitable world for converts and in continual danger of their lives. The Apostle Paul, who was not one of the original twelve, declares that he, too, saw the risen Jesus and such an impression was made upon his mind to that effect as to color his entire life, doctrine and labors. Now, this immense effect upon the followers of Jesus, this extraordinary transformation, demands some kind of explanation that will meet the fact and fairly account for it. It will hardly do to attribute it to the circulation of a false and groundless report that Jesus had risen from the dead — an event which they seem not to have been expecting, since they did not understand the allusions which he is said to have made

to it until after it is supposed to have happened. What occurred can never be known, but that something happened will be believed by many who apply themselves to the record with earnest and pious minds. Shall we say that Jesus, being the man of all men who realized the spiritual possibilities of human nature, who touched in his character its possible Divine heights, may be supposed to have appeared to his disciples in some real, though spiritual, manner? The supposition is not irrational, though I do not accept it as probable. Shall we suppose that the overwrought brains of one or more of the disciples, in some moment of intense activity evolved a vision? It is almost certain that such was the case with Paul. Shall we suppose that in talking together and recalling some of the promises of Jesus to be "with" them after his death the sense of his

spiritual companionship assumed such vividness that they could no longer think of him as dead but only as risen and at the right hand of God, in power, which seems most probable of all? Or shall we be content to leave the mystery unsolved as we are obliged to do with so many others. What is not the truth, what is not the fact, in a given case is much more easily defined than exactly what is.

It is often said by Christians, following the lead of Paul, that with the literal resurrection of Jesus Christianity itself stands or falls. It does not seem so to me. Miracles are the mere accompaniments of truth, even supposing them real and actual. Belief in them is not essential to a belief in the truth which they are supposed to accredit. God, immortality, moral relation between this life and the next form of life, Jesus, the highest expression of God in the

highest manhood—these are basal Christian truths; these are fundamental. A man who cannot and does not believe these is not a Christian; but he who does, and works out upon the basis of such eternal verities a righteous character, essentially is.

GOD.

Scientifically God is not a subject of knowledge, discussion, or even of inquiry. Whether there is a God and if there is what sort of being he is can not be known. It is only fair to admit that all scientific knowledge of God is impossible. His existence cannot be demonstrated by any of the methods of experiment usually employed in scientific research nor any of the processes of thought known to philosophy. Assuming his existence we assume that he is a Spirit and so not discoverable by physical or intellectual processes alone. We assume also that He is the Highest and the highest must be undefinable. Thus the relationship between mother

and child cannot be analyzed and expressed by the rule of three. The emotions awakened in the human breast by music or poetry are not subject to the test of acid or scalpel. The mystery of love will always elude the search of a microscopist. The quality of a poem or a literary style are not decided by the dip of the magnetic needle. In each such case the supposed instrument of knowledge is ill-adapted to its supposed purpose. Physics are properly investigated by experiment; mind is understood by mental action; soul or spirit can only be known by intuition, imagination, similarity of being — other soul process of some sort; never and not at all by logic or experiment. And, furthermore, the material is passive; it awaits the search of the investigator and gives up its secret freely, only asking labor, patience and calm fidelity. Mind, too, though not to the same extent, is open to strict

inquiry and analysis. But soul is more shy, more subtle; it suffers itself to be understood by him who approaches with his shoe off his foot as upon holy ground, but it permits no cataloguing, no defining, no logic-chopping explanations even by those who understand. The rude and coarse, the cold scientist or bloodless philosopher, are not permitted, as such, to enter the Holy of Holies of the soul. They must lay aside their tools, methods, shop garments, and enter as others do with intuitions and affections. In the case of God, the Over-Soul, the Soul of soul, the man of the muck rake can not know him; so he (of the muck rake) asserts and so we admit. He asserts further that no one can know Him. If knowing means scratching with a muck rake, as it strictly, scientifically does, we admit that too. God is not a subject of knowledge. But He is a subject for the contemplation of faith and his ex-

istence and character may be postulated with an *inferential probability* which amounts almost to scientific certainty and which affords a satisfactory working basis for rational belief.

Reasonable inferences are permitted to inquirers. For instance, one of the most interesting fields of scientific investigation is that which relates to pre-historic man. Facts are scarce in this direction. A few arrow or spear heads; still fewer human remains intermingled, somewhat doubtfully, with the remains of extinct animals; certain remarkable piles of shells; a number of mounds of earth; some charred spiles in the lakes of Switzerland and Ireland, and a few words which run back remotely through several languages. These are all or nearly all. Yet volume after volume issues from the press both in this country and in Europe which are composed largely of inferences from these facts; and so

admirably has this inferential labor been performed that the pre-historic world is outlined with all the minuteness which characterizes purely historical work. Some have even been daring enough to restore in pictures the forgotten scenes of the life which our pre-historic forefathers suffered, perhaps enjoyed. We know that this restorative work is largely imaginative but the inferences are so strong as to be practically undeniable, and we are persuaded, as we follow the facinating speculations of science that we are treading the solid earth of fact. Precisely thus we are in possession of certain facts upon which we base an inference with reference to God which serves all the purposes of religion as well as exact knowledge would do. Indeed, if we are allowed to hold that the spiritual senses are legitimate channels of spiritual information (and I cannot see why not) then we have *real knowledge*

and Job and Paul were right when they said: "I know." But not to press such a point too far, the pious mind is satisfied to look about in nature, behind in history, and within; and upon what he sees, learns, and is conscious of, ground the comforting and inspiriting assurance that God veritably is. The existence of God is open to doubt by those who must or will doubt, as any affirmation is, but multitudes, aye myriads, many of whom are of the most intelligent, learned and noble minded, are content to believe it and shape their conduct by the inspirations of such an exalted thought. In this they follow the common consciousness of mankind, to whom Atheism has always been exceptional. Agnosticics, Positivists, these there are and in respectable numbers of the great and good. But are there any Atheists? It may fairly be doubted. If there are they have become such by

some forcing of the mind to cast out an idea which is natural, which has always been kindly harbored and which, held rationally, can only make man better; never, by any possibility, worse.

As I have no difficulty, for myself, in considering the existence of God one of the closed questions never to be opened for doubt, so too that the idea of God includes personality but *is not limited by it*, I am fully persuaded. I am aware of the philosophical difficulties which inhere in such a view, but I, myself, this Me, is the answer to them all, and as far as I can see must always be. To this, Carlyle tells us, Frederick the Great always returned as a sheet anchor which kept him from drifting into atheism. How can the impersonal, the non-personal, evolve the personal; the lower produce the higher; a Not-Me or a No-Me bring forth a Me? The whence, how and whither of Me is mysterious, but *I* am not a mystery; I

am an indubitable fact. I know that this I is an actual existence; I know it practically however I may get tangled in the meshes of philosophy should I attempt to discuss the question. And knowing that I infer with a positiveness that amounts to assurance for me, at least, that somewhere else there is another I out of which this my personality sprung.

A close argument of such a theme as is under consideration here is precisely what I choose to avoid, as the intention of this work is to present certain subjects vital to human happiness in simple language and an every-day run of thought suitable to minds which have not been trained to think closely; to those who are unfamiliar with the technical terms of philosophy. I would not underrate, however, the difficulties with which the question is invested. I think they are very great. Particularly those which are presented in the form of Agnosticism. Pantheism and

Deism are not to be classed among irreligious views; both are essentially religious and when held by devout persons are not essentially un-Christian. Tom Paine's "Age of Reason," which is berated by many who have never read it as an irreligious almost an atheistic work is actually a religious one. Many persons are in the habit of associating the names of Robert Ingersol and Tom Paine as if they represented the same position with regard to religion, but there is as radical a difference between Ingersol and Paine as there was between Paine and any Christian of his day; very much greater than between Paine and a Liberal Christian of to-day. Enlightened, thoughtful Christians will find very little in the writings of Tom Paine against which they will feel obliged to protest. Paine was a Deist or Theist who expected to give an account of himself to God and whose ideas of God were so exalted that he

could not accept the Old Testament Scriptures as embodying true views of the Divine Nature. Ingersol is an Agnostic, who finds it impossible to positively believe in the existence of Deity and who has *no* religion because he says it is impossible to know anything about what is beyond or outside of the realm of experiment or logical demonstration. Atheism, to an Agnostic — which simply means one who does not know — is as irrational as any form of positive religious belief. It is as difficult to determine that there is no God as to decide that there is. We do not know whether there is or not and should positively assert neither.

It must be confessed that such a position is the most plausible of all forms of irreligion. Atheism incites to an inner revolt because it asserts what it cannot prove and what if true destroys every ground of hope for the future life and ultimately morality itself. If Atheism

should ever finally prevail in this world the logical and natural outcome of it would be the blasting of every household, the destruction of every government, the demolition of society by the abolition of all sense of responsibility and reducing all human conduct to the single motive of self-interest. The only sound philosophy in an Atheistic world would be: "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die," or "Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost." Positivism is vague and unsatisfactory. In place of God we are asked to worship the "Great Being Humanity;" in place of immortality we are given fame, which in the case of the obscure, that is to say ninety-nine hundredths of the race, means remembrance for a few years by those who knew and loved them in life, with the additional thought that the little influence which they may have had will

go on insensibly. Personality must be given up; absorbed in the "Great Being Humanity." There seem to be a few souls who are able to bring themselves to the endurance of such a bloodless, heartless, frozen negation of all belief as this system is; such a mockery of religion, for a religion it claims to be, with its places of assembly and forms of worship; but it is doubtful if such a religion could have more than a few adherents. There is nothing about it to charm the mind or pacify the reason and conscience. It destroys all hope

—"White-handed Hope,
The hovering angel girt with golden wings"—

as effectually as any other Atheism. It has none of the charm of uncertainty with the privilege of a blessed expectancy which characterizes Agnosticism and which constitutes its fascination as a system of thought. To evade respon-

sibility upon any plausible pretext is natural to man; much easier than to deny all responsibility. To be non-committal, "on the fence" as we sometimes say, has its comforts for most people on all important subjects and particularly in the case of religion. This is exactly what Agnosticism permits. It is entirely non-committal. Is there any God, any immortality, any heaven, any hell, any meeting of friends on the other side of the grave? It is impossible to say; there may be and there may not be; perhaps there is and perhaps there is not. Do you hope so? Certainly I hope so, or, rather, I would hope so if it were proper and consistent to have hopes with reference to that concerning which we can necessarily have no opinions. The Agnostic asserts nothing, but he denies nothing either, with regard to the extranatural. In opinion he is a Know Nothing. In conduct he is —

agnostic

laissez-faire. His attitude is exactly expressed by Protagoras, a pre-Christian Greek Agnostic: "Whether there be Gods or not we cannot say and life is too short to find out." It is such an easy solution of all troublesome questions. It does not decide at all. It simply puts off the subject; lays it on the table for future consideration in case there should be any need. It does not destroy morality for if it has no assurances to give the virtuous man that a blissful immortality awaits him neither does it assure the wicked that they have nothing to fear. On the one hand it leaves a sweet and on the other a dread — perhaps. In a transition period, when old faiths are breaking up (in form, at least) it furnishes an attractive and dignified refuge for many who cannot accept the traditional beliefs and who find Atheism in any form equally impossible. Into the harbor of Agnos-

ticism they may run and wait until the troubled waters subside.

As this system of belief or no belief has its charms for the mind and heart, so it is plausible from a scientific or philosophical point of view. As a matter of fact, as has already been admitted, we actually do not and cannot know any thing about what is beyond the range of human observation and experience. If we are to shut out inferences, intuitions, the testimony of consciousness, all faith, however reasonable, then it must be admitted that Agnosticism is scientific and logical; practically unanswerable; by far the most powerful opponent Christianity has ever had or probably ever will have. It is difficult to imagine a stronger position as against the Christian or any religion. But we are not prepared to concede that imagination, intuition, faith — elements of mentality

as surely as the logical faculty — go for naught. What were they given for if not for use? Why do they lead so directly to what seems truth if there is no such truth? Why this inner spiritual sense which cries out so persistently and pitifully after God that Agnostics themselves acknowledge its voice if there is no God? "As the hart panteth after the water brooks so panteth my soul after thee, O God." Why should we be so cruelly deceived? There is no fact of science testified to more certainly than that God is — than that there is some person or power, call it what you will, outside ourselves and yet not ourselves which "makes for righteousness;" some infinite Moral Power. Hear Herbert Spencer himself, the high priest of Agnosticism, abandon his own position in spite of himself: "Amid the mysteries which become the more mysterious the more they are

thought about, there will remain the one absolute certainty, that he (man) is ever in the presence of an Infinite and Eternal Energy, from which all things proceed." This may be said to have no reference to anything more than natural force, and so be entirely consonant with Mr. Spencer's philosophical theories. It may be denied that there is any reference here to God or any admission that there is a God. But such language is, nevertheless, far from Agnostic. If not by speculation or assumption — faith — how dare Mr. Spencer declare that anything is "an absolute certainty" of which he has no positive proof? And can he prove that the "Infinite and Eternal" certainty is an "Energy" and not energies? a force and not forces? How does he know there is only one and not many? Where is the scientific basis for the assertion that this "Energy" is "Infinite and Eternal?" How

can he possibly know that it is either? And what is the significance of those capital letters? In this statement Mr. Spencer has forfeited his title of Agnostic. He is no longer a Know Nothing but a Know Something, and it is very difficult to understand the difference between his statement (as far as to the manner in which his information was obtained) and a declaration which might be made by a Christian or any man of Faith to the effect that amid the mysteries which become the more mysterious the more they are thought about, there will remain the one absolute certainty that we are ever in the presence of an Infinite and Eternal God, from whom all things proceed. God is said to be too "warm" a word to use by men who are engaged in inquiries which call into use cold reason alone; but with the exception of this alleged warmth what is the difference between an Infi-

nite and Eternal Energy and an Infinite and Eternal God? The evidence for the one as for the other is precisely similar in kind. Neither is purely scientific, but if one is admissible among reasonable men the other is. The truth is that Mr. Spencer's declaration is a sublime and gracious testimony to the insistence of that inner voice which asserts, with power greater than mere thought, the existence of God. The more deeply this mysterious universe is pondered the more deeply is man convinced that it is not the result of chance but of Intelligence. The theory of creation is no more demonstrable than that of spontaneous generation or the eternity of matter and force. We know nothing of either as a process. But that the universe was purposely evolved is more believable than that it was not; that there is inherent cause for what we behold is more credible than that there is not;

that it involves something greater than itself is easier to believe than that it proceeded from itself or from nothing. We can really know nothing of any of these things but we have what may be called a good working knowledge of much which is inexplicable. There are many facts which we accept as facts concerning which we can assert nothing positively.

For instance: What is space? A substance, or not? An entity, a thing, or not? Is it anything, or nothing? Is it infinite? How can we assert it when infinity is a conception which the mind refuses to entertain? How can we declare space to be infinite when we do not know what infinitude means? Is it finite? It cannot be finite since we cannot imagine a boundary beyond which there is no space. What is time? The same line of thought will evince how impossible it is to say anything about it which may not

be called in question. What is motion or rest? We do not know. It is impossible, absolutely impossible, to define or understand any of these things or even to know whether they are things or not. And yet time, space and motion are accepted by us as practical facts. We travel through space; we make our notes payable upon a certain day; we rise up and work and lie down to rest with as much composure as if we knew all about them. They serve our purposes quite as well as if we thoroughly understood them. In precisely the same line of argument it may be said that we know nothing of God and the extranatural and can know nothing of them. It is perfectly true. That God is or is not; that he is personal or impersonal cannot be known. But God is, nevertheless, an element in the lives of the most of mankind as positive and practical, as inspiring and purifying as if He were thoroughly well

known. We may have no philosophic knowledge but we may have a good working knowledge; a sensible, reasonable faith which answers all the purposes of actual information.

Many are prepared, therefore, to assume God; to close the question so far as it is an individual one; "as far as I am concerned God is;" His existence is not to be doubted. The burden of proof is on the other side; "you must prove there is no God before I shall give up my belief that there is." But having assumed the existence of God some opinion will necessarily be held as to his relation to man and as to his character. Such an opinion will necessarily be speculative; based on what we suppose must be true of God according to our highest conceptions of power and goodness and according to the nature of things. We gain our idea of God simply by carrying the attributes of man up to infini-

tude. God is an Infinite Man. Further than this we cannot go as it is impossible for us to imagine anything which is not common to our experience. In all ages, therefore, the conception of God has followed the highest conception of man; has been a product of the prevailing civilization. When men were warlike heroes, when that was the highest type of man; when might was the only law of right; when treachery and bloodshed accompanied all the dealings of man with man; in such an age it was natural that God should have been supposed to act as his creatures did, some of whom were deified or became demigods. But as gentler manners prevail, as justice and morality and all the arts and devices of peace grow into ascendency God is clothed with softer and more spiritual attributes. He becomes the God of peace instead of war, of love instead of hate and revenge. Thus it is that be-

cause we live in an age of enlightenment, when the nobler qualities of man are beginning to express themselves in the operations of society, the cruder conceptions of previous periods concerning the Divine Nature are being rejected. We can no longer believe in one supposed to be Divine whose character is lower and worse in almost every particular than that which would now be necessary to admit a mere man into honorable relations with his fellows. Deception, cruelty and revenge are often practiced now, but they are no longer praised. What is reprobated in men can no longer be worshipped in God. It is impossible for us to believe that what is wrong for a man to do can by any possibility be right for God to do. Hence we are obliged to abandon the deities of the ancient civilizations and seek out new conceptions which will satisfy the ideals of character which we are now

able to create and which are much more exalted than those of previous ages. The gods and goddesses of Olympus may be interesting and amusing to us as we watch their pranks, very like those of big boys and girls at play, but we can not worship such beings. As we read Homer's description of them and their doings we can hardly escape the feeling that he himself did not altogether believe in them and that those for whom the story was written did not either. Such a poem would neither be produced nor received in an age of vital faith, which does not permit such religious dramatization. For one and another reason what is true of Greek ideas of God is true of all other pagan theology. We have outgrown it. But is it not true also of Hebrew theology and of much that is called Christian? However we may hesitate to admit it (because we do not like to break up to any extent,

not even the slightest, our old faith) it is a fact that we can no longer believe the Jehovah of the Old Testament to be a right conception of the God who veritably is, no matter how much we try; any more than we can believe as much of Jupiter, Ahrimazd or Moloch.

Jehovah is petulant, jealous, stern, frequently quite savage, cruel, vindictive, revengeful, unjust, untruthful, tricky, immoral. He is, in short, nothing more nor better than a great chief of a half civilized tribe. It is true that there are many beautiful passages in the Old Testament which ascribe high traits of character to Jehovah, but these belong to a period when the people were far more enlightened than when Jehovah became their national God during the time of Moses. The god who delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage is anything but one whom we can either worship or admire. He

was only one of many gods. It is popularly supposed that the Jews were a monotheistic people from the very beginning. Such was not the case, nor did they become such until long after their release from Egypt. Jehovah was not supposed to be the only but the greatest god. The command: "Thou shalt worship no other god before me" is an acknowledgement that there were other gods, but they must not be worshipped before Jehovah. We know that many other gods were worshipped in connection with Jehovah-worship, nor does there seem to have been any serious objection to it until Jehovah was superseded by some other. As has already been pointed out in the chapter on inspiration he frequently, even habitually, commends his servants for actions which we now understand to have been grossly wicked; which proves that they were not so considered then. Rahab (to

take a single instance) who was a harlot, is commended highly, honored with an extended posterity in Israel, mentiond as one of the ancestors of Jesus, and placed upon the roll of honor in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews by an early Christian writer. Such a writer had not yet learned that God could never really intend that a woman whose only recommendation to favor was that she basely betrayed her country, deceived her king and told lies for no other reason than that she and her family might be spared when the sack of Jericho occurred, should be transmitted to posterity as a model of virtue. Jehovah hardens the hearts of Israel's enemies and then drives his own warriors upon them because their hearts are hardened. He ordered his people to slay men, women and childen indiscriminately for no reason except that he desires their land for his own people; and

so on through a long catalogue of what would be called crimes if committed by men. Now if we suppose all this to be the record of the doings of a half civilized horde bent upon plunder and rapine, conquest if you like, whose moral notions were very dim and far from right, whose idea of virtue in others was fidelity to them, and whose conception of virtue in themselves was the utter destruction of their enemies, but who were withal, an exceedingly religious people, ready to ascribe all their success to their god who was a reflection of themselves; and if we further understand that as a record it is very imperfect, so much so that it is impossible to determine what of it is true and what false, most of it being legendary; it is intelligible enough and worthful and instructive as a record of national and religious development. It is true to human nature, at all events.

But if we are asked to believe this to be actual revelation, and that Jehovah is really God, we simply cannot, however hard we try. Probably not one thoughtful person in the whole world does so believe it without modification of any kind.

Nor is the New Testament entirely free from these unworthy views of God, though there are isolated expressions in that book as there are in the Old Testament embodying ideas of God which cannot be surpassed in any age. It ought to be clear that if God, for instance, is "Our Father" and if "God is love" he cannot possibly be the being he is represented to be elsewhere in the Bible.

Not satisfied, however, with the misrepresentations of the Sacred Writings the Christian theologians have made matters worse with their logic-chopping processes applied to the Scriptures. The

God of mediæval theology is simply inconceivable if we are to suppose God to be a good being. We are told, to begin with, that he lives for his own glory, for which all things were created. But we know that it is wrong for any one to live for his own glory. The inspired writers tell us to avoid selfishness above all other evils as being the very core of all evil. And yet we are asked to believe that there was not one thought of benevolence, self-forgetfulness in anything that God ever did except in so far as the promotion of his glory will be for the general good. Upon that principle any tyrant or railroad king might justify himself in seizing the reins of government or defrauding the community that his own hoard may be increased. We are taught that God's will is the supreme law of the universe and that no creature, not even man, has any rights which God is bound to respect. We

know, however, that what ought to rule this universe or any part of it is law, which at the bottom has the greatest good of all in view and which expresses itself in that justice which takes account of the rights of every one, the very dumb beasts included. A government by personal will is a tyranny and such a conception of the Divine government grew up when human liberty was unknown.

We are not surprised when we have learned this much from the theologians to learn further that, in order to magnify his glory and make it quite plain that his will can be exercised and must be respected, God foreordains that certain portions of the race shall be saved and certain other portions, by far the greater, shall be eternally damned, tormented in the sulphurous flames of hell; innocent infants along with the rest if they happen not to be among the number of the

"elect." There is no basis of selection in this matter but the Divine will. Morality does not enter into the problem. A good man if not elect is damned; a bad man if elect is saved. The only condition being that the elect must believe in the propitiatory sacrifice which God has made for the world in the death of his son. This, however, presents no difficulty in the way of the elect and opens no door of hope to the non-elect because it is impossible for the elect not to believe and it is equally impossible for the non-elect to believe. And the propitiatory sacrifice referred to involves a horrible and immoral conception of God. Is he, then, so enraged against man, so implacable in his hatred of the sinner that nothing but a bloody sacrifice will appease his anger? Is his notion of morality and justice so warped as to permit him to pass over the guilty by the punishment of the innocent? Does

he really believe that the punishment of an innocent person can in any conceivable way consistent with morality render a criminal a whit less guilty of his crimes? Does he really believe that a law once broken can be mended even by the death of the offender himself, to say nothing of the death of one who was not the offender? Is it impossible for him to forgive one of his children without requiring the death of another? Is he capable of damning myriads of human beings because they fail to do what he renders it definitively impossible for them to do? Is the "plan of salvation" a sort of Tartarus draught presented to the parched lips of multitudes who have no power to drink it? If so then it is quite clear that we know more than he does and are better than he is; and it will be found impossible to worship one who is our inferior in such important particulars.

We are ready to believe that there is a God, according to the Scriptures; that he is our Father; that he is Love; that he is, therefore, patient, forgiving, long-suffering, that he remembereth our frame that we are but dust in our instability and weakness, that he is not only as just and benevolent as we are but infinitely more so; that he is all and infinitely more than we can possibly conceive of goodness and greatness; and that being all this no eternal harm can ever come to one of his children however wayward and wicked; that though sin must and infallibly does bring its own punishment and therefore no sinner can ever go scot free, but will pay the penalty of his wrong doing, as is fair and right, God will nevertheless, find a way in the course of the eternal ages to win every one to himself; that is to say, through the awful results of sin he will awaken in every breast a final abhorrence of it

and a final love of that course of action which inevitably leads to the highest happiness.

Such a God is, indeed, presented to us in the Scriptures as also in nature, history and conscience. Every fluttering leaf and blushing flower, every drum of insect and song of bird, every life-enfolding clod and dancing wave, every sough of wind and murmur of brook, every ray of light and pulsation of heat, every electric bolt and roar of celestial artillery, every sound of childish laughter and whispered word of love; and, too, every tear and sigh; in its way, every pang of remorse; all these proclaim him. Such a one we delight to worship and serve, feeling that life can have no ambition so exalted as that of striving to bring one's self into alignment with his character; but by exactly so much as we love and serve such a being we must shrink from that other

which we get in the same Bible and in the lubrications of mediæval theology. The one is calculated to awaken the soul to an enthusiasm of moral earnestness; the other to deaden it into the dull despair of the slave or the fevered frenzy of the fatalist.

JESUS.

"SUBLIMER in this world know I nothing than a peasant saint, could such now anywhere be met with. Such a one will take thee back to Nazareth itself; thou wilt see the splendor of Heaven spring forth from the humblest depths of earth, like a light shining in great darkness." Thus writes Carlyle, an unbeliever in historical Christianity, in his strange biography of Teufelsdrockh. Jesus, the peasant saint, is, perhaps, the central fact of history. A character so wonderful, so unique, as to challenge the attention and homage of the ages regardless of religious predilections. If he has not drawn all men to

him as he is reported to have said he eventually would he has, at least, drawn the attention of all among whom his history is known. Before him Christians bow in reverence while others accord the obeisance of profound respect. It is a question whether he would have an enemy on this planet if he had always been permitted to figure before the world in his own proper person and as a person; if he had not been so effectually dehumanized, devitalized, dissected by his friends as to be no longer a person but a doctrine or, rather, a system of doctrines. The theological Christ is a sort of dried mummy from which many shrink away as being only a sad symbol of what was once living and real. The historical Jesus is a sweet-spirited peasant saint who disarms opposition and invites esteem and affection. In consequence of this I approach him in the

course of this discussion with a different spirit than that which was permissible when mere theories, opinions, doctrines were under consideration. A person is so different from a doctrine. A book is a more or less mechanical production of man; a theory is a simple question of opinion; a doctrine is but the statement of an opinion. Each invites criticism, is the legitimate subject of sternest inquiry. The only reverence which we have for opinions is that which is inspired by their probable truthfulness or their venerable associations. In any case their appeal is made to the mind, their treatment is purely intellectual. But in the case of a person, and especially one whose life is spotlessly pure and unspeakably winning anything like criticism is at once put to shame and defeated. History is illuminated by so few wholesome, noble lives, at whose feet we willingly sit in

receptive silence, that it is with a kind of pain and only under grave protest that we observe processes of critical investigation applied to one of them.

Jesus of Nazareth was probably the purest and greatest of men, if we admit, as we must, the moral and spiritual to be the highest human attributes. Other men have known more according to the usual standards of education; others have thought, or, at least, expressed their thoughts, more elaborately and in a larger range; others have accomplished more in the mere activities of human life, as of war or commerce; in short, others have said, written and done vastly more than he, quantitatively; but qualitatively and in what he essentially was probably none can approach him. Though he lived many centuries ago in the midst of a civilization unspeakably corrupt his conceptions of morality, even by the confession of

such a one as Thomas Paine, have never been surpassed. The only possible criticism which can be brought against his maxims for conduct is that they are so godlike in their superlative exaltation as to be impracticable in the present stage of existence: as for instance, that we should love our enemies and lend to every one who asks of us. And though others have wrought out elaborate systems of philosophy and religion none have gone beyond him in greatness of thought and depth of insight into the profundities of religion and human nature. He was a great teacher, a profound philosopher, a sublime moralist but he was also more than all these. We discover, by a sympathetic study of his biographies, imperfect as they surely are, qualities in him which not only appeal to mind and conscience but to what we call heart. He talked as if he expected his followers to love him and we dis-

cover that even at the distance of so many centuries it is very easy for us to meet this expectation. There is a quality in him which we do not find in any other great leader of the race (and there have been several by comparison with whom he is not degraded) which may aptly be called Life, which, indeed, it is called in his own and the words of others of the early Christians.

To me, for one, Jesus appears to be the highest possible development of human nature. Beyond him it seems to me humanity cannot go in moral and spiritual development. He is the supreme Man, and inasmuch as all men are partakers of the Divine Nature he is the Divinest Man. It is easy for me, therefore, to rank myself among his disciples and to call him Master and Lord. In a certain sense the mind should have no Master, but in a certain other sense we acknowledge the superiority of an-

other and gladly yield him homage. There is an indefiniteness, indeed, and so an objection, to the expression Lord, but the heart often carries us into superlatives which reason is not obliged to justify.

Acknowledging, thus, the Mastership of Jesus as the Head of the Human Race and he who, therefore, may be supposed to approach more nearly than any other the Divine Nature and to have lived more nearly than any other to the border line which separates the natural from the extranatural or which constitutes the meeting of the two realms, it may well be judged that I approach the consideration of certain questions which are raised by his biographies with an awe which is not felt in dealing with some of the legends of the Old Testament, sacred as are the associations of that collection of books. For Jesus I have the profoundest reverence and as a person

could no more detract from his greatness than I could malign the name of a beloved ancestor or friend. But the narrative which embodies our only history of this honored person is of such a character as to disturb our highest thoughts of him. The portrait of our friend which is untrue in lineament and expression we freely criticize without opening ourselves to the imputation of wanting respect for his memory. The biography which fails to record the actual life of our loved one and substitutes sayings and doings and corrolary events which were not true may be corrected with no dishonor to him whose virtues it distorts while it seeks to exalt.

The Jesus who actually lived and whose life afforded a basis for the four Gospels was, most probably, an entirely natural man; very good and very wonderful but not extranatural in person nor clothed with extranatural powers. He

was natural in his birth, life and death; in his thinking, saying and doing. It would be the greatest possible boon if we could have the exact record of such a life, freed from the legends which grew up during the first century after his death, which were, no doubt, implicitly believed by the early Christians and which were piously recorded as they were transmitted from mouth to mouth for two or three generations. Such a record, however, we do not possess and, of course, it is now unattainable, since we can no longer determine exactly what Jesus said or did, though it is plain what manner of man he was, upon the whole.

It has been already remarked that it is easier to determine what we do not and cannot believe than exactly what we do. It is so with regard of the gospel stories. Many things are related which we know cannot be true because not only are they inherently improbable, but in

some instances they are contradictory. Two records which flatly contradict each other cannot both be true. This would seem to need no demonstration. Take, for instance, the genealogical tables of Jesus' ancestry which are given in Matthew and Luke — in the first chapter of one and the third of the other. If they are carefully studied they will be found to be arranged on a suspiciously regular basis of exactly fourteen generations from period to period and to seriously disagree. It is said in explanation of this disparity that Matthew gives the line of Joseph while Luke gives that of Mary. According to the Gospels themselves this is not true; but admit it and it still leaves a grave difficulty, since if Joseph was not the father of Jesus (as the same narratives expressy declare) how can his ancestors be those of Jesus? These genealogies are invested with so many difficulties as to

have called out whole libraries in their discussion with practically no solution of the problem. They are probably entirely worthless. It is as probable as not that Jesus was not a descendant of David. Of course the early Christians would feel the necessity of attributing such an origin to him and the pious purpose once formed it would be carried out by that well known process of treating history which fits existing facts to the author's desire and in lieu of real data manufactures what are needful.

The story of what is called the Immaculate Conception is, of course, incredible. Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary, if these are the correct names of his parents. His birth was as natural as that of any other child. All religious heroes are supposed to come into the world through the conjunction of a god with a human being. Any number of such stories might be collated from religious records

and many will spring involuntarily into the mind of the well-informed reader. We have only to pause and consider how impossible it would be to convince any one or ourselves of the truthfulness of such a story now, to make it quite plain that no such thing was ever believed about Jesus until actual history had given place to legend; until long after the death of Jesus when he began to be worshipped as a Divine Being and it was felt to be necessary that his origin should be made extranatural. We are not obliged to suppose that any deliberate falsifying was done by the writers or any one else. Superstitious beliefs spring up we know not when or how. What is the origin of all of our folk-lore? Whence came all the superstitions which are common to daily life and from which we find it so difficult to free ourselves? Who first told the story about Washington and his hatchet or John

Smith and Pocahontas? We do not say that such stories are deliberate falsifications of history; we call them legends which grew up for reasons which can usually be deciphered but whose origin is lost in obscurity. It is impossible, however, to believe them after they once begin to be questioned and their real character is investigated.

The story about the wise men, who came to do homage to the infant Jesus, being led by a star from the far East to the very house in which the babe was lying, is of the same character. A vast amount of learned industry has been expended to prove astronomically the appearance of such a star at such a time. But the legend is childish in the extreme; it might have been honestly believed when people did not know what a star actually is but it is impossible for us to believe that a star hung down over a little hamlet with such definite-

ness as to point out a particular house. The thing is physically impossible and can only be believed by those who consider it a sufficient answer to every question to reply: "God can do anything."

The multitude of the heavenly hosts singing to the shepherds by night and directing them to the crib of the savior, beautiful as the story is, was only the seraphic conception of some early Christian poet or dreamer. Thus also the dove alighting upon the savior's head at his baptism accompanied by an audible voice from heaven; his walking on the water; his propelling a boat from the middle of a lake instantly to land; his transfiguration; his ascension and all such narratives are not historically true. They are, as recorded, extranatural events such as probably never occurred in this world and never will unless the present order of nature is superseded by some other.

So far as we are able to observe and to judge from thoroughly reliable evidence God never departs from his established order in nature. If it is replied that we do not know entirely what that order is and it is presumption to limit the operations of the author of it, it may be urged in rebuttal that while that is true, as all modest people will admit, we nevertheless, know enough to doubt such occurrences as these of which we are speaking and to render them so highly improbable as to demand for their acceptance absolutely unimpeachable evidence, such as we have not. The burden of proof is with those who hold to these occurrences but it will have to be much stronger than the testimony of documents so imperfectly historical as those of the Bible.

With reference to the great number of miracles which are attributed to Jesus

little more need be said than what already appears in a preceding chapter devoted to their discussion. Many of them are incredible; many are not. There will be no difficulty in believing that he effected cures especially among those who were afflicted with nervous ailments. Such cures are common to all ages and people and depend upon laws of mental and physical interaction which are so little understood as to give rise, even in this day, to the belief among many that extranatural agencies are prominently and effectively at work in our midst. Hardly an issue of the papers but some instance of a "faith cure" or some other sort of "mind cure" is reported, and there are multitudes, including, of course, the patients themselves, who believe that these cures are miraculous or, at least, extranatural in their character. They are in many instances the result of prayers and are believed to

be direct answers; if strictly so they involve a Divine interference with the operation of natural law; a supposition which we are not prepared to entertain. The phenomena of clairvoyance, spiritualism, mind reading, hypnotism, mind cure and the like are significant as indicating the probable existence of mental forces which have not yet been fully brought to light, forces which were perhaps superlatively operative in Jesus, but which do not necessarily involve the extranatural element; do not transcend nature. It will be safe and reasonable to ascribe the utmost of natural powers to Jesus, in whom the sum of human nature was carried to its highest expression, but we must insist upon this limitation. He was a wonderful personage and performed, doubtless, many marvelous works; much that he says and does and was is beyond our knowledge and probably would be even if we had exact rec-

ords of his life, but he was probably no more than natural.

If he was only this, it may be asked, why should he still be conceded the place of Lord and Master for the religious world? What claims has he upon such leadership more than another? If he is not an extranatural being wherein lies his authority above such as Socrates, the Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, Mahommed? To such inquiries there is but one reasonable answer: His authority is not different in kind, only in degree. It is exactly such as is wielded by any truth-speaker and truth-liver. It is only such as the Truth furnishes wherever it is found and in whomsoever. Each one of the great men whose names were just mentioned was an inspired teacher, many of whose utterances and much of whose example is authoritative because true and good. When they are placed in comparison with Jesus it is not to

discredit but to honor them to the full limit of their deserts. They were, upon the whole, true and good men and in so far as they were they serve us as safe guides; but they were probably neither as true nor good as Jesus. He, therefore, is a better guide, and until some greater shall arise, the BEST. Hardly are any of his utterances entirely original. Most of the very best of them may be found in the Talmud and other religious books. But in his mouth they were accompanied with a peculiar power and life which did not attach to them before. "He spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes." "Never man spoke as this man." These are the reported testimonies of his contemporaries, and indicate not artificial, extranatural authority but that which is always exercised by a real man who breaks away from conventionality and

traditionalism and speaks out the divine word that is in him at whatever cost. His authority was that of a moral giant. As sensitively organized as a woman he was charged with moral heroism of the highest order, of that rare type which expresses itself in calmness of spirit. Bravery with bluster is not uncommon; physical courage is often exhibited among the lower orders of men; the courage of concerted action is witnessed upon every battle field and in every great movement of reform, or anti-reform, for that matter; but quiet moral courage which goes to duty and death with no applause and little audience is indeed of the rarest. This was that which characterized Jesus too superlatively for words, and it is for this reason that he has become the Ideal of every man who struggles for spiritual manhood. Great as Paul was and splendid in his

moral struggles there is an almost utter lack of that peculiar poise which constitutes the moral glory of his Master. Paul was a man of war who could flame out anathemas against his enemies and refuse to succumb before dangers or difficulties. We admire and applaud him as a remarkable servant of God, but we cannot hide from ourselves that amid his inspired boldness there was an element of quite human stubbornness and partisanship such as has been seen both before and since in other great ones — as Elijah and Luther and many more — who have fought singled handed against the world. Where, however, is there another who combines indomitable will with gentle regard for the opinions of others; inflexible purity with broad charity for wrong doers; unfaltering purpose with patient endurance under hindrance and insult; splendid courage with no fanat-

icism; sublime consciousness of great personal powers with real humility; disappointment and failure with peace of mind; the lack of every earthly good with contentment; where is there else to be found such symmetry of life, such "sweet sanity" as in Jesus? Absolutely nowhere, to my thinking. This marvelous Life alone has been the bulwark of Christianity through ages of shame and darkness wherein her enemies have been less injurious to her real interests than her friends. We cannot, indeed, follow those who clothe him with the attributes of God but when we experience the reverence which his character inspires, when we realize the height upon which he stands as compared with any other whatsoever, we are not surprised that a portion of that race which has deified so many men infinitely his inferiors should have crowded the same honor

upon him. He does not need it, however, and it is far better that he should be recognized and valued for what he really was and carefully imitated than deified and disobeyed. We have one God who is all and in all. We can have no other and need no other. But our good men are so few that we may reasonably be permitted to rejoice in this one as a man and be thankful that poor human nature is capable of such possibilities.

The deification of Jesus has led to that doctrine of all others which is the most impossible of belief by any thinking person whose mind is not paralyzed by long subserviency to constituted ecclesiastical authority — the Trinity. God is three persons, we are told, and yet he is but one person. This is not a puzzle, as it is sometimes called, but a flat impossibility, inconceivable to the human mind. A man may accept such

a doctrine because he is told that it is true and it will be wrong for him not to do so; but believe it he can not. It is not above reason but against it. There may be a world in which three times one is one but it is not so in this world. There may be a sphere in which three personalities can be at the same time only one personality but to us such an arrangement of personalities is inconceivable. It is true that no such doctrine appears in scripture, although Jesus is spoken of as a divine person. There are many strange legends and wonderful stories in the Bible but it was left to the theologians of later ages to devise the grotesque wonder of the Trinity. It is not in scripture, but if we accept the absolute divinity of Jesus such a doctrine is a necessity. That in itself is enough to prove that Jesus was not God for there cannot be two Gods and at the same time only

one God. If the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Ghost is God there are three Gods. But the Bible itself declares there is but one God. There cannot be three and at the same time only one. It is easier to deny the existence of any God than to believe such a staring absurdity. Jesus was not God though a very Godlike man. As such we revere him and humbly strive to imitate him, feeling that to live in such a way as to win his approval is the highest aim which can be placed before the mind and the surest way to please God.

Why is it needful that one should speak with extranatural authority in order to be believed? Is not the truth sufficient authority? How is it any better to say this and this is true because Jesus or Paul or Moses said it than to say the great teachers said it because it is true? "Honor thy father

and thy mother." Is this a good saying only because it has the authority of the Ten Commandments? Is it not good upon its own account? Why do we accept the golden rule? Because Jesus uttered it? Is it not rather because we see how good it is in itself? And is not this the reason and the sole reason why the words of Jesus have been so largely accepted and his life so generally revered? Both were true and good; they commend themselves to us as such upon our own best judgment. If they were not true and good we should not accept them though they were clothed with all the authority of God. Men will not believe that which they finally discover to be untrue no matter with what authority it is clothed. Just as they threw off the yoke of the mediæval church with all its power and claims to infallibility because they came to know that it was

teaching lies which were called truth upon the authority of the church so will they throw off any authority when they discover that it is offering a stone for bread. When men believed it was right to slaughter all the inhabitants of a conquered city, including the infirm and the little infants, they could believe that Jehovah ordered the sack of Jericho; but when they come to understand that such a performance is barbarous and criminal and unworthy of civilized people they can no longer believe that God ever commanded men to perform such a horrid deed; and though the authority of the Bible were ten-fold greater than it is, and though we are told by the priests and the church that the book was all written by inspiration and must, therefore, be true, we cannot yet believe it. We find it easier to believe that the Bible is not inspired as it is said to be than to be-

lieve that God could ever have commanded men to do what was wrong. And, too, though Jesus evidently believed in demoniacal possession, a personal devil, and a material hell, as it is quite natural he should, considering when and where he lived, we discard such ideas, because not even the best authority can make us believe what to us is unreasonable or improbable.

Sometimes, however, we are told that we do not know what is right or wrong for God to do; we do not know what is the truth. It is pretty safe, nevertheless, to conclude that what is wrong for a man to do is wrong for God to do. It is very hard to believe that there are two standards of right and wrong in this universe—one for God and one for men. And any creed which requires such a supposition for its support is not worthy of belief. We do not, indeed, know what the truth is in

every instance, but we are gradually coming to a better understanding of it; we are getting enough light to warrant us in deciding that certain things are not true and that is a step toward knowing what is. This much is sure, reason and conscience are the only bar to which all questions of truth must be brought and when these finally decide adversely the decision must be allowed to rest; otherwise we cease to be true to ourselves and when that occurs we are open to the acceptance and practice of every lie.

The authority of Jesus, then is in the truthfulnes of his words and life in so far as they were true, and as far as we can determine what they really were. This will be found sufficient if we bring ourselves into sympathy with his great heart and pure character. We shall not be likely to seek another Master, but will be disposed to say with Peter:

"Lord, to whom shall we go; thou hast the words of eternal life." These words and his example will be found the way of salvation for us. To follow him steadfastly with what earnestness poor, weak human nature is capable of will surely lead us into the favor of his Father and ours.

How much more natural and inspiring such a thought is than those which are engendered by the contemplation of what is called the "plan of salvation." God, we are told, is too holy to have any dealings with sinful men; his anger burns against them every day because of their wickedness. To be sure, they cannot help being wicked because many of them are non-elect and could not be pleasing to God however they should try. But this makes no difference with God, who will surely cast them into eternal torment for not doing what they could not do. We can well believe this when we

are told that God is so fierce in his hatred of sin that his anger can only be appeased by the slaughter of some victim. It ought to be the offending sinner, but it must be some one. His law has been broken by man and the full penalty must be paid. Nothing can be done by man toward paying the penalty except to finally go off into hell and there suffer through eternity. There is no help for him. Not a single one can save himself, to say nothing of others, because every one becomes guilty in God's sight before he is old enough to know what he is doing; is born guilty, in fact, the whole of Adam's transgression being attributed to him. He is actually guilty of what took place six thousand years before he was born. This is a desperate position to be in. No doubt if one could know of it before coming into a life hampered by such fearful conditions and clouded by such a

destiny he would decline being born at all; but unfortunately he is not allowed to have his way in the matter. Since he can do nothing for himself in these gloomy circumstances something must be done for him. But by whom? No man can help him and God will not because it is of more importance to him that his law should be honored and his holiness magnified than that billions of mere human beings should be saved from eternal torments. In this state of affairs the only begotten Son of God (who is also God himself; that is, God is both his own son and his own father) offers to pay the dreadful penalty of the broken law. This he does by allowing himself to be put to death by the men for whom he died and in dying God took the opportunity of pouring out upon him all the phials of his wrath. When he died upon the cross it was not at all as a martyr but as a bloody sacrifice which was

necessary to appease the awful wrath of God, who up to this time stood over the race with his sword whetted and stands thus now over every one who does not take advantage of this bleeding sacrifice. Jesus having now suffered in the sinner's stead, as his substitute, all that remains to do is to believe in him as a sin offering and be saved. No goodness is required; it stands in the way, in fact; we are only to believe and be saved "by the blood."

The first impression which this "plan of salvation" made upon my childish mind, as I distinctively remember, was that I ought to be very thankful to the good Jesus who so kindly took my place and saved me from a horrible fate, but I could not understand why I should thank God for anything, as my debt to him was all paid by another and I, therefore, owed him nothing; and beside he had done nothing but permit some one else to save me; I should have been

lost if my salvation had depended upon him. I was told that I ought to love God very much for providing this "plan." But I could not understand why it was not more reasonable to dislike a being who would not save me himself and could heap such horrors upon his own son. And, in truth, it is not any clearer to me yet, after years of study.

It seems hardly necessary to expose the fallacy of this whole scheme, which the theologians tell us is too wonderful to have been devised by man and therefore must be divine. To me, at least, it seems too unreasonable, awful and immoral to have been devised by any one but man and therefore cannot be divine. The fallacy is in likening sin to debt which can be paid by another. The kernel of the sacrificial plan of salvation is that "Jesus paid it all." Sin, however, is not a debt but a moral

transgression, which is essentialy different. No payment can atone for a crime. When this thought is apprehended the impossibility of salvation by the blood of another becomes apparent. It is impossible to repair a broken law even by the death of the offender himself; how much more by the death of one who is not the offender. A law once broken is broken forever. No amount of punishment visited upon any one can possibly atone for the offence. To hang a murderer does not mend the broken law nor vindicate it; it merely breaks it again by another murder. But there is more than fallacy in this scheme; it involves degrading ideas of God and immoralities. In the first place, it is impossible to imagine that the real God can be such a being as requires bloody sacrifices to appease his anger. Such a thought is only acceptable to half-civilized minds. The North American In-

dians were moved by a more reasonable conception when they offered sacrifices to the evil spirits but never to the good. A being who can only be mollified by slaughtered victims must be a devil; such a one cannot be God. Again, it is inconceivable that a God who is described as our Father and who is said to be love could cast myriads of human beings into eternal torment for a few years of wrong doing. Eternity is so long and life is so short that no matter what the enormity of the crime the injustice of the punishment is apparent to the cruelest mind. Not only could no parent act thus toward a child but it is difficult to imagine an enmity sufficiently implacable as to demand such revenge. Furthermore, that an innocent person should suffer for the guilt of another is highly immoral. One person cannot suffer for another, penally. The thing is morally unthinkable. But if

it could be so, an arrangement by which an innocent person is made to endure punishment which attaches to another's wrong doing is itself wrong in the extreme and we cannot, for an instant, suppose God to be its author. In view of such facts as these we not only have no trouble in discarding the substitutionary doctrine of the atonement, as it is called, but we are amazed that such a theory could have found currency; nor would it except as an outcome of a theological scheme based upon superstition and followed to its logical conclusions, however hideous. Such a theological system and such doctrines can only survive under priestcraft, an established church or a rigid rule of orthodoxy — conditions which palsy the mind and debauch the conscience.

To give up such doctrines is tantamount to the wreck of faith with many; to me it is coming into a larger and healthier piety. Jesus of Nazareth, the

"peasant saint," is a far more wholesome object of reverence and affection than Jesus, the incarnate God, offering up himself to himself as a bloody sacrifice, to appease his own implacable anger against his children. There is a mixture of demonology and play-acting in that whole, unreal, supposed performance well calculated to drive one to infidelity or madness. Let us be content and happy in the belief that God is indeed our Father, that we are the objects of his affection, that no harm will ever come to a good man, that He will find a way to reclaim the worst, that good will finally overcome evil, and that if we do as Jesus says, walk as he walked as best we can we may safely trust the Good Father to forgive our shortcomings without the necessity of any shedding of blood.

If all this, as hinted above, seems destructive to faith the only reply that can be made is that it is not really so; it

is only destructive to false beliefs which one is much better without, however painful the operation of removal. It is better to believe the truth at any expense than an untruth at whatever gain; and surely to one who loves moral worth and spiritual excellence more than mere wonders there is enough in Jesus of Nazareth to satisfy him. There were many who followed him in his lifetime merely because they saw his astonishing works, not because they delighted in the words which he uttered. These were not pleasing to him. And such as only follow him now because they are dazzled by the extranatural halo which has been flung around him by wonder-loving devotees rather than for love of him in his pure and truthful manhood can be little more so. If we are his followers our fidelity is not to be judged by how much we believe about him but by how completely we imitate him.

THE CHURCH.

THE church is commonly described as embracing two divisions known as the visible and invisible. They are not separate, much of the invisible being contained in the visible; neither are they co-extensive, many members of the invisible not being of the visible portion and many of the visible not being of the invisible number. The invisible church comprises the sum of all true believers in Jesus Christ, those who exercise "saving faith," whether in the past or present, whether in the state beyond the grave or in this mortal condition; doubtless, also, taking the foreknowledge of God into the account, all who will in

the future become true believers must be included in the invisible, or real, spiritual church, the "body of Christ." The visible church, on the other hand, embraces only those who profess to be true believers; the members of the various local organizations the sum of whom constitute organized Christianity on the earth. In general this may be supposed to ignore all sectarian distinctions, though there are a few who would probably exclude the more broadly heterodox sects, such as Universalists and, more especially, the Unitarians from all title to the name of the church or claim to any of its honors or privileges. There was a time when each sect claimed to be alone the church, all the others being lost heretics, whose pretensions to real membership in the true church were groundless. This can hardly be said, however, to be true now of any but the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the few

bigoted protestants who scout the heterodox bodies already referred to.

That which fits one for church membership is supposed to be a "regenerated" heart which is the result of true faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior and in the work of the Holy Ghost. Most denominations add to this requirement, as a test of genuine faith, superscription to a creed, a confession of faith, articles of belief, a catechism, as these documents are variously called; and some require submission to the rites which accompany public confession of religion in a particular mode, as, for instance, the various Baptist bodies who insist upon administering baptism by immersion only. The rite of baptism is usually required by all sects but others than the Baptists permit the candidate to choose which form he prefers, immersion, sprinkling or pouring water upon the head. In all religious bodies but the Baptist this rite is also

enjoined or recommended to be performed upon infants, the parents engaging to do for the children that which is required and which they are not yet able to do themselves. This practice grew up when it was believed that unregenerate infants went to hell and when regeneration was believed to accompany the act of baptism and still lingers, though the horrid belief in which it originated is practically obsolete among protestants; not, however, among Catholics. It is true that the doctrine is still contained in some of the protestant creeds, as the Presbyterian, but those who have subscribed to this creed would be very much scandalized if they were accused of actually believing it. This is an illustration of the manner in which a creed necessitates falsehood among those who are obliged to subscribe to it in order to retain their orthodox reputation. Doubtless if a Presbyterian minister should come boldly out

and reject a creed which teaches such a monstrous doctrine he would be compelled to resign his position by his companions in the ministry, not one of whom believes the statement any more than himself. It is, doubtless because of the fear of thus losing place and caste that so many ministers allow themselves to hold creeds they do not believe; but when the ministerial conscience gets into this condition the power of ministers as moral and spiritual leaders is gone. Such is, practically, now the case.

The Church is supposed to have been founded by Christ, who is called its head as it is called his body. Such, however, is not the case, as Jesus formed no organization of any kind. It is doubtful if he ever used the word "church" or expressed the idea of the church as we now understand the term. The word occurs in the Gospels but twice. It is placed, indeed, in the mouth of Jesus

in both instances, but the use of the word which describes a condition which did not arise until after Jesus was dead is good proof that it was placed in his mouth by some later author who wished to invest a rule with his authority. If a brother goes astray, Jesus is made to say in one instance, let the one whom he has offended go to him and endeavor to settle the difficulty; if he fails let him take two or three others and make another attempt with their aid and in their presence; if he still fails and the offender is obdurate then he must be brought before the church and if he is still intractable he is to be ostracised and treated henceforth as a heathen and a publican. This gentle, cumulative method of discipline is both kind and wise; it is a thousand pities it has not been followed by the church; but as there was no church when Jesus is supposed to have given the direction, and

as, for that reason, it would have been wholly unintelligible to the disciples who at that time had no cenception of such an institution, the strong probabilities are that the words were never uttered by Jesus. This argument applies with equal force to the famous passage in which Christ is made to build his church upon the rock — Peter. It is impossible that Jesus ever said anything so absurd. The truth is that Jesus was a Jew and he did not seek to become anything else. His mission was not the formation of a new religion but the spiritualizing of the old. He strove to lead his countrymen away from the dead formalism of the Pharisees and the blank materialism of the Sadducees; to break up the traditionalism which had settled like a frozen incrustation over Jewish society and religion; to call them away from their miserable wiredrawings and hair splittings concerning mere precepts and com-

mandments of men to a free, fresh, large worship of him who was a spirit and desired only those to worship him who could approach him in spirit and in truth. He formed his followers into no organization, not even the loosest; he left no commands in regard to any such future establishment. He did leave a touching request that after he was gone, when his followers should draw around the paschal board, they would think of him who gave his life in the good cause of truth which he hoped they would not desert; he did say that wherever two or three were gathered in his name and for the cause which cost him his life there he would in spirit be; that is to say he left the idea of unity of purpose and union for accomplishing that great purpose, but further than this there is nothing which by any means can be twisted into the semblance of what we now call the

visible church, or organized Christianity, either in form or spirit.

For some time after the death of Jesus there was no break between his disciples and the Jews. They are seen worshipping in the Temple as did all other Jews, nor did any such break ever completely occur in the case of those Christians who remained in Jerusalem and under the influence of Judaism. They were called Christians first at Antioch, not a Jewish city, and were known among the Gentiles as a Jewish sect. We find even Paul, who made such a heroic fight against Jewish religion, reported as performing a vow strictly according to Jewish rites late in his life and for the express purpose of proving that the Christians had not separated from the Jews. Paul was the real founder of the Christian Church, though he is careful to explain that he is not the head of it. He says he

founded it upon Jesus who was its foundation and chief corner stone. Nothing is plainer than that Paul claims to have instituted the church by a revelation which was specially given to him, and it was his contention that the church was an institution separate and distinct from Judaism that involved him in so much trouble and surrounded him with so many enemies among the Jews. Paul's idea was that a Gentile might come into the church without the necessity of circumcision, that is, without the necessity of first becoming a Jew, simply upon the ground of his faith in the Christ; and that if a Jew came into the church his circumcision was of no advantage to him. He must come precisely as the Gentile came, solely on the ground of faith. That is to say, the church, as Paul established it, was an entirely new idea, unlike anything which had been heard of before among either

the Jews or Christians. In so far as Paul's conception was a broad and liberal one, and so a rebuke to the narrowness of the Jews, who believed that none but Jews, and those who became Jews by conversion, could possibly be the favorites of Jehovah, it was quite in accord with the teaching of Jesus. Herein lay the greatness of Paul, that he apprehended the catholicity of Jesus to a greater extent than any other in his day. Peter could never quite bring himself to the point of admitting the Gentiles into the church upon a perfect equality with Jews, and James was even more of a Jew than Peter.

A marvelous story is told in the Acts of the Apostles of how Peter saw a vision of clean and unclean beasts and was told to slay and eat. This vision was sent to him to impress upon him the equality of all men in God's sight and it served the purpose for awhile,

but soon he was overcome by the arguments of his countrymen and the prejudices of his own mind and lapsed into a narrowness which he was never afterward entirely able to overcome. The church question was the burning issue of the Apostolic age and shared with the preaching of the gospel to sinners the attention of Paul and the others. It is pretty plain that it gave rise to serious party quarrels in the early Christian communities, and there was, perhaps, a much more serious division than appears from the records which we have of that time in the book of Acts, which has evidently been edited with a view to reconciling all parties and concealing the magnitude of the trouble. Before the death of the apostles sectarianism had made inroads among the brethren and that purity and simplicity which is supposed to characterize the earliest days of the church was sadly marred.

The truth is that the golden age of the church, as all other golden ages, never existed. There was a simplicity in the first Christian years which we no more see, but it was only because the people were, as a rule, very poor and the church was so hounded with persecutions that its high offices were not only not lucrative nor honorable in the world but were attended with such danger by rendering the incumbent more conspicuous than the rest as to call for the highest heroism. The habits and manners of the first Christians were simple and generous as those of poor people driven together by persecution for a common cause are apt to be; though it must be confessed that the story of Ananias and Sapphira reveals a hypocrisy in the very earliest church which could hardly be looked for at such a little remove from the time of the great teacher himself. Paul's epis-

tles reveal abundantly a bitterness in controversy which was highly un-Christian and from which he was not entirely free, for, like most effective men, he combined unfaltering devotion to the truth as he understood it with considerable impatience at contradiction. That human nature was the same then as now is also evinced by the conduct of Peter, who, though a noble nature in many respects, was something of a time-server in the days of the church controversy as in those of the trial of his master. Paul rebuked him severely for violating his own convictions of duty, nor is there any evidence that Peter could make any reply. Later on we find, too, that James must correct the abuses of wealth among the Christians. Just as soon as freedom from persecution was enjoyed we find the church infected with the fashions of the world; women were stylish and conspicuous in

their dress and the rich oppressed the poor, as is still the case among the professed followers of Jesus, who was both poor himself and the friend of the poor. Nor were the morals of the early Christians of the best. We find Paul more than once calling attention, in his epistles, sharply to the prevalence of such immoralities as he himself says were too gross to be mentioned. The early days of the church were in some respects its very worst, and to one who knows its history for nearly nineteen centuries that is a heavy charge to bring. It is, nevertheless, true that there has never been a visible institution on this earth which might fairly be called a church or the church of Jesus Christ, if by that is meant an institution which preaches his truth and is animated entirely by his spirit. To this there will be exceptions in favor of particular local bodies and for a short time.

At different periods men have arisen who have been brave and true enough to break away from the established church or rule of orthodoxy and start afresh with a gospel and a conduct more nearly suggestive of the great master, but such movements are usually characterized by extravagances of reaction and in time lapse into the very practices against which they were organized to protest. So that we are able to appreciate the profound significance of that saying of Jesus: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation; it is within you; if any say to you lo, it is here or there, go not after him, for no matter how honest he may be he will finally deceive you and lead you astray." It would seem to be impossible to organize men into any kind of society which shall express that which Jesus came to teach. "My kingdom," said he, "is not of this world." But every visible organization

among men *is* of this world and soon becomes exceedingly worldly; the decay invariably following the attainment of wealth and power.

When the church emerges from obscurity near the beginning of the third century we find her already seeking a unity of faith by stifling thought and so preventing all diversity of opinion; seeking monotony rather than harmony. We find her also striving to establish her authority by every possible political and worldly method. Her doctrinaires are not truth hunters but partisan warriors with whom victory is more desirable than verity; her officials are no longer humble servants of the community but place hunters glorying in the pomp of office. There are a few honorable exceptions as there always are in such circumstances, but such was the character of the institution, which has never been lost from that day to this.

When she finally overcame persecution and became a great world power she asserted herself more and more until she became the most remorseless and cruel hierarchy on the face of the globe; her Popes were in many instances monsters of crime and immorality who were vulgar in their pomp and love of power which was obtained by every foul intrigue and conspiracy. Rivers of blood have been shed in the name of the Prince of Peace; slaughter has followed butchery for the maintenance of what was called pure doctrine; fire and sword have been employed for the extermination of heresy, which was almost the only known crime for ages except an attempt to limit the power or revenues of the church; Popes, bishops and priests, filthy with sin but orthodox in belief, have been the judges of Christ-like men and pure women and condemned them to untellable tortures for

the holding of an opinion not sanctioned by the infallible church; any crime might be pardoned the faithful but no virtue could save the heretic. What monstrous mockery to speak of that institution whose drapery smells of the blood which is hardly dry upon it and whose track in history is marked with martyrs' ashes; whose principles necessarily involve the death of intellect and the paralysis of conscience, the church of Christ. She lives because of the good which has been accomplished by her humble votaries, many of whom have been white-souled saints, but she deserves to perish from the earth for her horrible crimes, sanctioned by those who were in authority and which grew out of the infamous principles that it is a sin to think and that it is right to do wrong for pious purposes. The Roman Catholic Church is the scandal of history.

Thus far, no doubt, many Protestants will go with me, admitting the truth of all that has been said of her whom they delight to call the "Mother of Harlots." But if she is the mother of harlots her daughters must be abroad somewhere; I mean that we shall probably be able to find other organizations which have sprung out of her and which exhibit a remarkable family resemblance to her. Where is the Protestant sect which has not persecuted heretics? Read the history of the Scotch Covenanters and English Puritans who were made to pass under the harrow of Laud and other dignitaries of the Church of England and it will be quite clear that the mantle of the mother fell upon the daughter. But what is stranger yet, the victims in this case, as in that of the Church of England, which from being persecuted became a persecutor, exhibited the same disposition and were guilty of the same

crimes as soon as they possessed the ascendency. One of the most significant pages of history is that of the English Puritans fleeing to America for the express purpose of discovering an asylum for persecuted saints where complete religious liberty might be enjoyed and afterward flogging at the cart's tail, burning and otherwise torturing those who differed from them in religious belief or who were suspected of witchcraft. As they fled from English persecutors so fled Roger Williams from them; as they suffered at the hands of others so suffered Ann Hutchinson at theirs. The liberty which they really sought was liberty to believe with them; they could no more tolerate difference of opinion than could Rome or England, and the only reason why they were not the tormenters in England and the establishment the sufferer was because they had not the power in their hands. What

such men could and would do when power was given them is evidenced under Cromwell and in New England.

But it is sometimes said that those days are past and those doings are irrelevant to the question at issue. But is that true? There are, indeed, no more fires lighted nor dungeons opened for the torture of heretics, but is not persecution still carried to the limits of ecclesiastical power? Artificial barriers erected by bigotry are still the separating lines between the warring sects. It is folly to say they are not warring sects because a progressive spirit of enlightened tolerance is exhibited in conventions and union gatherings of various kinds, for this lamb-like attitude is only maintained while no distinctive doctrine of either body represented is attacked. The moment any tender subject is broached it is as fire to powder. Little villages with a population hardly large enough for the

support of one small Christian church are made the battle grounds of several denominations, each of which is more interested in destroying the other than in breaking the ranks of the ungodly. Society in such places is thrown into cliques and sects whose lines are co-extensive with the different religious bodies and it is impossible to conceal the rancor which is always latent and often breaks forth. Mission fields, where it would seem indispensable that Christianity should present an unbroken front and waive all minor differences in presence of the heathen, are the scenes of the same unseemly strife, until it is a marvel that the heathen do not with one voice arise and declare that they will believe none of the Christians until they are able to settle their disagreements among themselves. That multitudes of converts are annually made to Christianity only proves what enormous vitality there is

in the fundamental truths of Christianity; but furnishes no justification nor palliation for the unseemly strife and wanton waste of money which is necessary to sustain so many missionary organizations when one ought to be enough. The dream of Jesus was that unity of spirit might characterize his followers wherever they were and in whatever time; unity of spirit in the midst of diversities of thought, no doubt; but there is practically no such unity in the church. Those denominations whose original idea was unsectarianism have without exception, perhaps, become as sectarian as the rest, presenting now the strange anomaly of unsectarian sects, undenominational denominations; unsectarianism has become their shibboleth and they disfellowship those who cannot pronounce it.

Now, sectarianism is the old persecuting spirit. The State lays her hand upon the throat of each party and will

allow no more physical torture, but there is a mental torture which is still possible and which is as ruthlessly applied upon occasion as ever the faggot was. The clergyman who departs from the standards of orthodoxy erected by his sect, unless he stifles his convictions and becomes, indeed, unworthy of respect from himself or others, is quickly made to feel the power of the church. His brethren give him the cold shoulder because to do otherwise would involve them in his condemnation, and in every way he is made to feel that he is under the ban of ostracism which is as cruel and merciless in its way as that of the inquisition itself. Many a sensitive nature has sunk under the unkindness which has been experienced at the hands of fellow-Christians for no other cause than difference of opinion. It frequently happens, nay it is more apt to be the case than otherwise, that these so-called

heretics are the best of men; only men of strong convictions and great honesty have the courage to break with "the powers that be." But all their goodness goes for naught in view of their dissent from the received opinions of their sect. They must become time-servers or abandon the company of those with whom all their religious associations are connected to seek a new home in another sect, or they must leave the church entirely as an organized body. The biographer of Frederick W. Robertson, one of the sweetest spirits which ever adorned the English Church or the Christian pulpit, gives it as his opinion that his premature death, one of the saddest, was attributable in no small degree to the cruel neglect which was visited upon him by his bishop for the sole reason that he was not strictly orthodox. No doubt this is true of many more just such sensitively organized men, and if

so then it is yet possible to hound a good man to his death for his opinions. That is to say, the church has merely changed her tactics to meet the new conditions which surround her, using more subtle but not less destructive weapons of warfare against the unfaithful, much after the manner of M. Rodin, who succeeded in destroying the family of the Wandering Jew through the subtle forces of the mind after his predecessor had failed of his object by the coarser methods of physical suffering. The actual shedding of blood is more shocking to our refined sensibilities but the methods of punishing heresy of to-day are as wicked and un-Christian in principle as ever they were.

But not alone in her intolerance is the Protestent church at one with the Catholic. In her pride and worldliness she is the same. Her buildings are as gorgeous when wealth is at her command,

her ministry is as worldly and ambitious. The price of a pew in a modern city church is equal to a poor man's rent; the style of dressing among the congregation is so rich and extravagant that certain portions of the scriptures wherein the subject of apparel is treated could not be read without provoking a broad smile among those who were possessed with any sense of humor; the music of the sanctuary is largely produced by professionals who are sometimes as gross in morals as accomplished in their art; the minister is a great man who lives upon a princely salary; the entire tone of the establishment is such as to be a flat contradiction of the gospels, so that he who believes the sayings and reveres the life of Jesus can not possibly respect it and he who accommodates himself to it cannot possibly be a sincere representative of the religion of Jesus Christ. The typical city Protestant church is

little, if anything, more than a place of fashionable entertainment to break the monotony of the Sabbath day and to assist in determining one's place in society; sharing in this latter regard its honors with leading tailors, dressmakers, milliners, jewelers and caterers. Just as it is fashionable to wear dresses and bonnets and jewelry with the stamp of a certain maker and to call in a particular caterer when a party is given so it is fashionable to attend certain churches. It is often remarked and with patent truthfulness that if Jesus himself were living and should seek to enter a Christian church on a Sunday morning on a fashionable street or avenue he would probably be denied admission, he would certainly be compelled to stand in the vestibule until the pew-owners were seated, and if he finally went in he would probably be made to feel so uncomfortable in his plain clothes and unpretending per-

sonage as to find escape a happy release.

There are many plausible arguments to support this state of things. What system or institution has not its special pleaders? But they are such as fail to convince. Any intelligent, unprejudiced reader who will take the life of Jesus and compare its spirit and the hopes which he expressed for his followers and his description of his kingdom with the Christian church of to-day, Catholic or protestant, must admit that one is radically unlike the other. He said his kingdom was not of this world; but the church is of this world. It is a great moneyed institution whose object is not the conversion of sinners but the perpetuation of itself by almost any means. The minister is hired with reference to his ability to draw a congregation and thus meet the financial demands of the concern. Fashionable choirs are organized

for the same purpose and if these attractions cost a great deal of money it is expended cheerfully as a means of drawing it from the people, on precisely the same principle as that on which Mme. Patti is paid $5,000 a night — because the manager can make more with her at that price than with any one else at a lower figure. Fairs and festivals and every kind of poor show are resorted to for purposes of finance; often the laws of the state against gambling are infringed at these church entertainments where games of chance are freely allowed.

Jesus said he that would be great among his disciples must be the servant of all. But greatness in the Christian church seems to be sought on the same principle which governs ambition in any other direction. In the Catholic and the English church the ecclesiastical digni-

taries are simply worldly princes whose entire style of living is a mockery of Christianity, and in other bodies the difference is only in degree, not in kind. Place-seeking is practiced in every denomination as assiduously and by exactly the same kind of intrigue, time-serving and caucusing as characterizes any other political arena. Jesus declares that he who would follow him must deny himself and take up his cross daily. But how little self-denial is practiced now by his professed followers for the good of others! Surely the easy-going gentlemen in soft raiment who can be found at every fashionable assemby eating and drinking and who leave their parishes in troops for several months during the summer to seek pleasure in Europe, do not suggest that it is the rule of life in the church. Jesus said many things, too numerous to mention, all of which

are not followed by his church. This showing is made without the slightest fear of contradiction for it is all so apparent that he who runs may read.

It may be difficult, and I admit that it is, to explain how it can be changed for the better, or even to meet every sophistical argument which is plied in palliation of evils which are generally admitted, but it is not difficult to make it quite plain that "the times are out of joint." There is certainly something radically wrong when ministers of religion live so splendidly, churches are housed in such magnificence, so much money is spent for pomp and show in the services, and so much is lying idly in some of the church treasuries, and at the same time the cry of the starving is going up into the ears of him in whose name all this is done. Much can be found in the teaching of Jesus which describes benevolence and

charity as the highest spirituality and to this we are exhorted in burning words; but nothing can be found which would lead us to suppose that God is pleased with the present glory of the church or that there is any real worship or religion in it all. Nevertheless the church does that which is not commanded and against which it is expressly commanded and neglects to do that which it is expressly exhorted to do. Whatever is the right road this is surely the wrong one in which the church is now walking, and if the church is losing her hold upon the mass of the people in all lands, as I believe she is, it is because they have discovered that as at present constituted she is a blind guide, she is merely holding on to old beliefs which were once vital, however mistaken, but are no longer believed, nor has anything better taken their place; she is what Carlyle calls "a

Church gone dumb with old age which only mumbles delirium prior to dissolution; a Church fallen speechless from obesity and apoplexy."

There is no disposition here to underrate the great virtues of many Christians nor the good deeds which owe their origin and consummation to the Christian church. Her charities are multitudinous and multiform and that too in those very centres of population where her worst features are discovered; missions, hospitals and every form of eleemosynary society spring up and flourish under her eaves. She alone, almost does anything for the wretched of the earth in the way of direct charity. In order to make it quite plain that no spleen dictates what has been written above, that they are the wounds of a friend rather than an enemy I am free to say that with all her errors and crimes

upon her I believe her to have been the receptacle of much truth, and if one must choose between her and atheism in any form there ought to be no difficulty in deciding at once that the church is infinitely better for us than that. But such is not the alternative presented. We are to choose between a worse and a better expression of true religion. I do not believe the church expresses true Christianity and therefore do not believe she is the kingdom of heaven for which Jesus prayed. She is a very strong kingdom, however, and it will be a long time before she crumbles to her fall, though the process of disintegration has unmistakably begun. Meantime it remains for those who see the facts as they are to be true to themselves in forming their convictions, to utter the truth upon occasion, to go with the church as far as they can, to cry aloud and spare not

against her wrong-doing and to patiently suffer the consequences as members of that true church which is formed of all men everywhere who love the right and therefore love God and who keep their minds free to think and their consciences clear; who are seeking above all things to live as Jesus lived.

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

This book is under no circumstances to be taken from the Building

form 410